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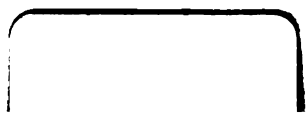
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# THE POOR COUSIN:

A NOVEL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

EDITED BY THE AUTHOR OF

'THE SCOTTISH HEIRESS;' "THE YOUNG WIDOW;" "THE YOUNG  
BARONET;" ETC.

VOL. I.

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LONDON:

T. C. NEWBY, 72, MORTIMER STREET.

1846.

804.



## PREFACE.

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I THINK it necessary to state the cause of my having become sponsor for the following novel.

When the first two volumes were perused by me, I admired them exceedingly, and warmly encouraged a continuance of the work. It was speedily completed, and on being sent for publication, it was intimated that if the novel came out under the hands of some one whose works were already known at the circulating libraries, it might conduce to its more immediate success.

I have not scrupled to take that duty on me ; first, because I sincerely admire the book, and secondly, because I conceive that I have a perfect right to

employ any influence, however small, that I may legitimately possess in a relation of literature, which, if it had always been faithfully and honestly administered by those who have the real power to abuse it, or to render it beneficial, would not, in the present case, be matter for justification.

THE EDITOR.

## CHAPTER I.

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“ A man he was to all the country dear.”

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IN one of the most secluded and picturesque parts of secluded and picturesque Westmoreland—and close to the village from which it took its name, there stood, some fifteen years ago, the small, thatched Parsonage of Glandale. It was in all truth a sweet spot to look upon ; the old house itself nearly covered with ivy, with here and there a trained rose-tree raising its blushing face amidst the darker green of the creeping plant, and the tall sycamores that lined the garden-walls, throwing such a pleasant shade, in the warm summer days, on the smooth grass-plots, and flowering shrubs ; and dark woods

and quiet valleys were around it ; and, at a short distance, glittering at the bases of a cluster of bare hills, one of those beautiful lakes for which this part of England is so celebrated, added its effect to heighten the striking loveliness of a spot, which had often been declared to be without its equal in Britain. But whatever might have been its claims to this distinction, they were never questioned by the worthy rector and his gentle wife, whose happy abode it was.

The Rev. Arthur Herbert, or as he was more generally called, the good parson of Glandale, had lived here more than twenty years, deservedly beloved by his little flock ; for his heart was with his vocation ; and the interests, the hopes and fears of those around him, he made his own. And a calm and happy life he led with the chosen of his youth. Truly they might have said, the lines have fallen to us in pleasant places ; one blessing of the heart only had been withheld, they were childless ; but if ever a sigh arose at this reflection, it was instantly checked



by the remembrance of the many other sources of happiness they possessed. Mr. Herbert was a few years past what is called middle-life, but time had dealt gently with him, for his troubles had been few. His wife was somewhat younger, and a sweeter, worthier being never blessed a husband's love.

Such were the persons, and the state of things at Glandale, when, one evening, as the rector and his wife sat together in their little parlour, enjoying the pure summer air as it entered at the open window, bearing the delicate perfume of their favourite roses, Mrs. Herbert suddenly uttered an exclamation of surprise at seeing the village postman enter the garden-gate—for relations they had few, and correspondents still fewer. The good rector had just carefully wiped his spectacles, and replaced them in their leathern case, (for he had been reading to his wife a funeral sermon, that was to be preached on the ensuing sabbath,) but these he hastily drew out again, and prepared to peruse the large,

triply sealed letter, which the servant with a wondering face presented to him. It was from a brother in India, from whom he had not heard for many a long year—written on his death-bed, and bequeathing to him the guardianship of his only child, whose mother had died, he said, soon after its birth. Few particulars were given, beyond that the child was a girl, and the expression of the dying man's wish that she should remain at Glandale until she had attained the age of seventeen, "when," added the writer, "another guardian whom I have appointed, an old friend of mine, who is still in India, will have returned to England with his family; and under their protection she will be introduced," continued the dying nabob, with a dash of vain-glory on the solemn side of his almost opened grave—"she will be introduced to that society which I trust your care and instruction will fit her to adorn."—Enclosed was a copy of his will, and a communication from his acting executor—in whose handwriting was the address on the

securely sealed envelope—stating that Mr. Herbert had died a few days after having written the letter now forwarded, and had expressed a wish that it should be sent to England without delay. The writer added also, that the child would sail in a few days from Bombay, attended by her nurse, and accompanied also by a son of the other guardian mentioned in her father's will; and further suggested, that it would be advisable for her uncle himself to meet her in London, and take her home. The will contained the same instructions as those given in the letter. A handsome legacy was bequeathed to the rector, and a few trifling ones to friends in India, and the remainder of a fortune—from the documentary record of its details, evidently amounting to something about two hundred thousand pounds—was left to his only child Eva, to accumulate under trust (with its necessary deductions) until she should be of age; which, as far as the law would permit, the testator willed should be at eighteen,—an Indian idea of the period of womanhood no doubt influencing the nabob in this.

Mr. Herbert laid down the letter with a troubled countenance, while his wife testified only pleasure at the thought of having a child whom they could rear and love as their own ; and a thousand pleasing visions of the future were passing rapidly through her mind, when she noticed the unusual gravity of her husband, and anxiously inquired the cause. She knew that he could not feel any very active grief at hearing of the death of a brother with whom he had not been in the slightest communication for upwards of a dozen years,—and she was right. The good man was not thinking of his brother, but of his brother's child, and of the anxious trust reposed in him. He pictured to himself a spoiled and wilful girl, a petted heiress, whom he was expected to mould into an amiable and accomplished woman ; and to cultivate a mind, where, perhaps, already the seeds of pride and vanity had been sown. In fact, he saw only the dark side of the picture, for he remembered her father—a wilful, haughty, overbearing boy, in the home where their common parent, a grey-

haired admiral, had often treated with severity outbursts of passion which sometimes almost broke the heart of the affectionate mother of the old sailor's sons; and afterwards whose youthful follies became so imperious and so great, that it was found necessary to send him out of the way; and so he was shipped off to India,—an exportation, considered by the friends of the young man, rather as the means of relieving themselves of a burden, than as a consignment with which any worthy hope could be embarked. And sent out he was, to be out of the way of mischief, and to make his fortune in India. Something of this Mr. Herbert now expressed to his wife; but the only shadow on the smiling prospect which she could perceive, was the necessity for her husband's immediate absence from Glandale; for they saw by the post-office date of its shipment, that the letter had been some weeks delayed, and doubted not that young Eva was already in England. No time therefore was to be lost. The assistant of a

neighbouring rector was called upon, and he agreed to perform the duties of the ensuing Sunday ; and that evening, Mr. Herbert, for the first time since his marriage, left his home, on a journey which would take him beyond the bounds of watery Westmoreland.

And short as this separation seemed likely, in all probability, to be, the parting was a severe trial both to the husband and wife ; for it was the first of its kind ; and Mrs. Herbert, though she was neither young nor romantic, wept more bitter tears as she sat that night alone in her little parlour, than she remembered ever to have done. A weight was on her spirits, which she in vain endeavoured to shake off ; she could neither read nor work, nor pursue any of her usual occupations ;—and thus passed the three first days of her husband's absence ; when, on the fourth, a letter came, informing her, first, of his safe arrival in London, and, secondly, that he had ascertained that the vessel in which their niece had embarked was expected in a very few

days, "and in a week at furthest," added the writer, "I hope, my Annie, to be at our own beautiful Glandale again." And in a postscript, he commended some favourite rose-trees to her special care ; which, he said, he expected to find in full bloom on his return.

And now the fond-hearted wife was happy again ; and with a brightened countenance prepared to visit in the village some poor clients of her thoughtful kindness, who, she remembered, with a feeling of shame at the indulgence of her own apparently selfish sorrow, had been neglected since her husband's departure. She lingered in one house where an infectious fever was raging ; and to the surprise of all the village, (for she had constantly been in the habit of visiting, and even nursing the poor in worse diseases,) she was herself seized with it on the following day, and ere the close of the third succeeding, the good, the pious Christian, the beloved and happy wife, lay a corpse, in that house where she had enjoyed for so many years such pure and unbroken happiness.

And the husband returned to his beautiful Glandale, and found its quiet valleys as full of sunny peace, and its deep woods as rich in forest green; and the pure lake sleeping as calmly, and the sheen of the sunbeams on its waters as ceaseless as when he had left; and his cherished rose-trees too were blooming as he had expected; but the rose of his heart was withered, and nature had no more charms for him; the wife of his bosom was gone, and his home was desolate.



## CHAP. II.

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" I stand upon youth's fragile bark,  
Buoyant with hope's wild wave."

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EvA HERBERT was a few months turned of twelve years of age, when she was welcomed to England by her uncle. He saw a beautiful girl, already with the outline of a graceful figure,—something of a brunette; but the smooth forehead, the dark luminous eyes, that seemed to change with every passing feeling; the short upper lip, and the dash of woman's will which mingled with the sweet expression of the little mouth, gave the countenance a tone of purity and frankness, which won her uncle's heart at once.

She had been her father's sole idol, and her

sorrow for his death was, for a time, violent and ungovernable. For weeks after, she would see no one but the old nurse who now accompanied her to England; to this person, who had been with her from infancy, she was fondly attached; and old Janet returned her affection with that devotion which the heart gives to one object, when it is the sole one—and at length succeeded in moderating the intensity of the daughter's grief, so that by the time she arrived in England, although she still thought of her father with sorrowful regret, Eva's heart was occasionally as light, and her laugh as joyous as when he, by whom she had been so worshipped, had made her happiness his only thought, and listened with rapture to every tone of that merry voice.

But besides old Janet, she had another companion and consoler in Stuart Aylmer, the son of her Indian guardian, who, returning to England from a visit he had paid his family, had willingly devoted his time, during a somewhat tedious

voyage, to the amusement of his sister's play-fellow and his father's ward. And it was with a passion of grief that absolutely frightened her quiet uncle, that Eva parted from this kind companion on their arrival in London, and made him promise again and again to come to Glandale, on his return from a journey which he was to make to Italy.

Such then was the niece of the good parson of Glandale whom he had brought to his home, and eagerly the warm-hearted child now strove with all those gentle arts with which nature had so eminently gifted her, to win her uncle from the indulgence of a grief that had bowed his spirit to the earth; and after the first struggle, when reason itself had nearly given way before the all-absorbing influence of such agony, he listened, with an aching heart indeed, but still a grateful smile, to her earnest and affectionate efforts at consolation, and even blessed God that such a comforter had been sent at such a time. But it was not till the second Sunday after his return,

that he could resume his duties in that church, where he had been united to her whom now he mourned, and where each sabbath, for so many years, he had looked down on that meek and happy face, raised fondly and approvingly to his, and listened to that sweet voice which he ever distinguished from all others, as she joined in the simple hymns of praise to their Creator ; and it was with a faltering step that he ascended the pulpit stairs, and prepared to preach the very sermon he had been reading to his wife the day on which his brother's letter arrived,—the last they had spent together ; and each heart painfully sympathised with his, as he spoke of the departed, and prayed for strength to support so sore a trial ; but as his eyes wandered round the simple building, every object so forcibly recalled her image, that his voice grew thicker and more tremulous, till he almost feared to proceed. There, sat the children of her own little school, and many of them were weeping, for they were orphans and had loved her as a

mother ; and the old blind man that every body knew, sat near the pulpit—in the same place where he had sat for the last twenty years—in the easy chair her care had provided for him, and tears too were flowing from his sightless eyes ; and more than all, there was her own vacant seat ! And still thicker grew the stricken husband's voice, till his words could scarcely be distinguished ; and every listener rejoiced when he hastily concluded that mournful sermon, and buried his face in his hands, to stifle the choking sob which still was heard, and long after remembered, when the grass was high on the grave of her whose loss had occasioned it.

Eva waited at the church-door for her uncle, and silently took his hand, but spoke not till they reached the parsonage, and then with a look of child-like but impassioned sympathy, threw her arms round the mourner's neck, and mingled her tears with his. He drew his brother's weeping child to his bosom, and from that moment she became unto him as a daughter, and her

happiness a new inducement for him to struggle with his regrets. And he did struggle, and manfully too; and though his cheek was now, and ever after paler, and his head more bent than of yore, few noticed the change, and still fewer guessed the ceaseless yearning of the heart to the receding past, and the weariness of spirit which accompanied him whithersoever he went.

And thus time sped at the beautiful parsonage of Glandale, and Eva grew more lovely and womanlike every year, and more dear and necessary to her uncle's heart, and old Janet remained with her, and contributed not a little in ministering to the wayward impulses of the youthful heiress; and in due course of time a governess came, and for a few months kept a resolution she had made, to curb her pupil's somewhat oriental spirit, and bring her into subjection,—but even she at last yielded to that pupil's fascination, and the cold and stately Miss Penelope Stanley, gentlewoman of all accomplishments, became in her turn one of the playfellows

and worshippers of the affectionate but impulsive girl; for though the daily studies were still attended to, it was no longer as a preceptor and a scholar, but as an elder with a younger and beloved sister. And they explored those beautiful valleys together, and Eva would speak of India and her childish days, and of her father who had loved her so well, and of Stuart Aylmer the companion of her voyage, whom she said she had so loved; and the quiet governess sometimes smiled, but oftener sighed at the young girl's enthusiasm.

And thus Eva reached her seventeenth year, and it wanted but a few months of its completion—the period when she was to join the family of her other guardian—who had been some time in England—and she looked forward to it, half fearfully and half in joy; fearfully, when she thought of leaving all whose love and communion had become so necessary to her heart, for the society of comparative strangers; and joyfully, as a young beauty ever looks to that world, to a knowledge

of which romances have been her only guide. And rapidly sped these few last months to all, but sadly and most sorrowfully to the fond uncle, who saw the last tie that bound his heart to earth about to be broken ; and jealously would he try to keep her ever by his side, feeling restless and unhappy when she left him for a moment. And Eva grew still fonder of the beautiful spot which she was about to leave, and would steal out when he was taking his afternoon's nap, and wander alone in the deep larch-woods, and linger in the grassy valleys where so many of her happy hours had been passed ; and there was one spot in particular, called the "Murmuring Glen"—because it retained in low, continuous murmurs the echoes of a waterfall which appeared in the distance like a white streak of cloud through the dark pine-trees—that she liked above all ; and there she had often sat during the still evenings of the long summer days, and with some old romance upon her knee, that Janet (against her better judgment) had been prevailed upon to procure,



imagined herself the heroine of the tale she read, and the hero her imagination ever pictured was Stuart Aylmer; and although she could now smile at the remembrance of those day-dreamings, yet the same image almost unconsciously mingled in the young girl's thoughts and visions of the future,—that future which she loved to people with all that was bright and beautiful; and if ever a spot of fair English land was calculated to inspire and foster such wilful dreams, it was the beautiful and lonely “Murmuring Glen.” So sweet and solemn was the place, and so connected with mournful legends, that the country people avoided it—from something perhaps of that feeling which makes them dislike to enter an empty cathedral church,—and thus it had the charm of seclusion, which enhances the value of so many of life's best things. The steep banks on either side were covered with blue-bells, which in early summer almost concealed the green of the short spiral grass; with here and there an old oak-tree shading the richer sward at the base of the acclivities;

and a small clear stream ran through the centre, mingling its tinklings with the murmurs of the water-fall.

And this was the place to which Eva came most frequently now, and often lingered till the twilight was grey ; dreaming sweet dreams of happiness that no voice had yet whispered to her could never be realized ; and the last evening of her stay at Glandale arrived, and as usual she stole out alone and bent her steps towards the Glen, to which she was to bid a long, it might be, a last adieu ; and her heart was sad, for she saw what her uncle suffered at the anticipation of their parting, and often she had been on the point of renouncing all, and boldly avowing her determination to remain with him. But Eva's was but a woman's heart after all ; she was conscious of her surpassing beauty, and the rest may be imagined. She opposed no obstacle to her departure, she was happy at the thoughts of going ; and yet, on this last evening her spirit was very sad, and she sat for hours abstractedly

watching the little brook winding its chirping course through the valley; and for the first time she saw dark shadows in her vision of the future; a strange fear of coming evil crept into her heart, and for the first time also she shed the tears which are more bitter than those of childhood. She felt that in leaving Glandale she was embarking on an unknown sea, which her present sensations told her might be a troubled one; but, like Rasselas, her heart yearned for something beyond the happy valley; and in search of that *ignis fatuus*, the meteor of life, she was content to encounter all the perils that must attend her departure from the security of tranquillity. But these few hours of lonely musing had made her wiser than before. It was the eve of a new era in her destiny, and she felt it to be so; and Eva Herbert returned to the house more of a woman in feeling than when she left it.

It was a mournful evening at the parsonage. Her uncle and Miss Stanley were to accompany her to London; for the latter was to reside in

the neighbourhood of the metropolis ; and Eva rejoiced that she should have at least one friend near her. Many were the plans which the young heiress formed, to be put in execution when she should come of age, for a reunion with those friends so dear to her ; and they listened and smiled on her as they had ever done, yet her heart grew sadder and sadder as the evening wore away. And when the hour of separating came, and Eva received her uncle's usual kiss and blessing, she could not raise her eyes to the old man's face, but rushing to her own room, gave way to a passionate flood of tears ; and until sleep closed her weeping eyes, all her brilliant visions of the future were forgotten.

## CHAPTER III.

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*"She goes unto love yet untried and new,  
She parts from love that hath ever been true."*

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A FAIRER sun had never shone over the woods and valleys of Glandale, than that which arose on the following morning ; and Eva hailed it as a happy omen, and smiles again lighted up her speaking face, as she descended to the breakfast-parlour, and silently took her seat by her uncle's side, and placed her little hand in his. But no answering smiles met her own—a look of painful despondency marked the old man's features ; yet his thoughts were not now with the beautiful being by his side, but with her whose loss he had

never ceased to mourn. The preparations for his present journey recalled the last he had taken, and the deep, deep misery that accompanied his coming back,—nor was this one likely to end more happily. Again he should return to a desolate home, more desolate now than ever; for no young voice would be there to utter words of cheering, no light footstep would henceforth rouse him from his mournful musings, and no bright smile gladden his winter's hearth—"alone, evermore alone!" such were the words his sinking heart kept whispering to itself; and still he heeded not his niece's presence, till Eva walking to the window threw it open, and then gently drew her uncle to the spot. It was a sweet May morning, and the dew was yet sparkling on the grass and flowers; everything looked bright and fresh in that little garden, as bright and fresh as it had ever looked; there was no change there; but Mr. Herbert turned from the fair scene with a sickening sensation, as he reflected that this would be the last time the

eyes he loved would gaze on it with him, for though Eva again and again had promised to return to Glandale when she became of age, he could not but feel how conditional such a promise must be ; long before then—and he scarcely hoped it otherwise—another might claim that affection of which at present he knew he had the largest share, or many events that none could foresee, but common enough in this changing world, might occur to prevent their re-union, that re-union which was now all he had to look forward to on this side the grave. And in such sad reveries he continued till Miss Stanley joined them, when they sat down to their morning meal,—and then they once more separated to make the final arrangements for their departure.

The journey was a melancholy one, and the spirits of each of that little party saddened more and more as its termination approached. Eva and Miss Stanley parted with mutual feelings of affection and regret, but with many promises of continued intercourse and correspondence ;

the latter left her companions within a short distance of London, where some friends of hers then resided, and the uncle and niece were alone ; and though they knew that this was the last time perhaps for years that they might enjoy unrestrained communion, neither spoke during the remainder of the journey ; each for the other's sake striving to hide those feelings which a single word would have betrayed. The hearts of both were full, and thus sadly and silently they reached the house of Mr. Aylmer, on the evening of the second day from that on which they had left Glandale.

The noise, the lights, the ceaseless hurrying to and fro, everything that met her wondering sight, so unlike the tranquil sameness of the home she had left, produced a painful and bewildering sensation in Eva's mind, as she reflected how soon she would be without a friend—at least without that friend who was at present all the world to her—in this strange and uncouth looking place : and tears were glistening in her eyes when she



was shown with her uncle into the spacious and splendidly furnished drawing-room of one of the finest mansions in Portland-square.

Old Janet had hurried to her mistress on descending from her seat on the box, where she had been feasting her eyes and ears with sights and sounds to which they had been long unused, for though born in London, she had spent most of her life far away from it, and now hailed it again as an exile welcomes the land of his birth ; and eagerly she employed all her simple rhetoric in endeavouring to persuade her "dear Miss Eva" that she must be happy in such a grand and lovely place, before which, she declared, the village of Glandale would never dare to hold up its head ; and Eva thanked her for her attempts at consolation, and assured Janet she felt their kindness not the less, because at present she could not profit by them, and then she commended the old woman to the care of a smart, bustling housekeeper, who now made her appearance.

In a few minutes after, an elderly gentleman,

with a benovolent, good-tempered face, whom Eva perfectly remembered, entered the drawing-room, and cordially welcomed his beautiful ward to London, apologizing for the absence of his wife, who, he said, (not expecting Miss Herbert till the following day) had gone with her daughters to the opera ; he was then introduced to her uncle, and politely pressed him to make their house his home during his stay in town, which, however, Mr. Herbert declined, alleging his intention of returning to Glandale on the following day ; and during all this time Eva's tears were flowing fast, for the barrier she had opposed to this display of feeling once broken down, they could no longer be restrained ; and Mr. Aylmer, respecting her emotion, left her alone with her uncle, saying he was going to send an old acquaintance, his youngest daughter, Fanny, who being not yet " come out," he added, was allowed the privilege of staying at home, to preserve her complexion, and read to her old papa. And but a short time did the uncle and niece now remain

together, for Mr. Herbert longed for solitude, to indulge those feelings which he knew would but increase his companion's own grief to witness ; and hastily wringing her hand, and invoking a thousand blessings on her head, he hurried from the room, promising to see her again on the morrow,—and in a few moments, Eva heard the post-chaise leave the door.

Several minutes elapsed, and still she stood in the same spot where she had parted from her uncle, seemingly unconscious of every surrounding object, her eyes dim and heavy from weeping, and her brain dizzy with the change a few hours had wrought in her situation. She was aroused from her sorrowful meditations by hearing a soft voice pronounce her name ; on turning round, she saw by her side a very young and exceedingly interesting looking girl, and the sweet child-like voice fell on her ear like pleasant music, as the speaker said,—“ Miss Herbert, you do not remember me. It is more than four years since we parted. I am Fanny, little Fanny that *was*, and then your favourite playfellow. There is but one year

between us, I believe—but, oh how beautiful, how very beautiful you are grown !” she continued, gazing with unfeigned admiration at her companion. “ Let me take you to your room, I am so sorry mamma is out ; but I will not treat you as a stranger, even for a moment. I have so longed for your coming, and I am sure we shall be friends.” And thus, as she led the way to Eva’s room, and long after they were both seated there, Fanny Aylmer rattled on from one subject to another, scarcely ever waiting for an answer, and seemingly right glad to have found so attentive and quiet a listener. She spoke of her brother, whom she said she scarcely knew, except by his letters ; and Eva listened eagerly to this, and longed, but dared not ask, when he would return ; she learned only that he was abroad with an invalid uncle, the same with whom he had spent his youth ; and Fanny only ceased talking when her companion, affectionately wishing her good night, begged to have Janet sent to her, as she was anxious to retire early to rest, after the fatigues of the two preceding days.

But it is right that the reader should now know something of the family, of which Eva Herbert had become a member.

Mr. Aylmer, like Eva's father, had been sent to India when very young, and like him too, had amassed a considerable fortune there ; but truly English in heart and character, he had ever looked forward with eagerness to a return to his native land, especially when he was married and had a family ; but for his children's sake, he continued toiling for wealth in a country he detested, that in his latter days he might see them enjoy it in the one he had always loved. His wife was a perfect contrast to himself, inasmuch as she despised everything and everybody who had the misfortune to be English ; and how she ever came to make up her mind to marry an Englishman, was a matter of ceaseless astonishment to all who knew her, except her husband—for in *him* sincere regret soon swallowed up any feeling of surprise he might at first have shared in common with her other acquaintance. It will

naturally be supposed that Mrs. Aylmer was not an Englishwoman herself, but alas! the truth must be told; she had the unhappiness to be not only an Englishwoman, but a cockney. Her dislike to her offending country was supposed to have been imbibed during a six months' sojourn at a fashionable boarding-school in Dieppe, whither she had gone to be "finished," before her parents had received the offer of a distant relative in India, to take one of their daughters and get her eligibly married in that country, where, he assured them, a girl had only to go, instantly to find an excellent husband. This proposal being highly acceptable to the father and mother of four marriageable daughters, Clara, the prettiest, but least amiable of the quartett, was immediately selected, and sent to that most desirable land, where, in a short time after her arrival, she became the wife of the wealthy and respected Mr. Aylmer. On his part the match was one of affection, for he had been much struck with her pretty face and apparently simple manners; on hers it was

purely a matter of *convenience*, and too soon he became convinced of this. Though he ever treated her with the greatest respect and consideration, those feelings which had existed at the commencement of their union were very speedily succeeded by others of a different nature ; and had it not been for his children, to whom he was most fondly attached, Mr. Aylmer would have had little domestic happiness to boast of. As it was, there came frequent thunder-clouds athwart their matrimonial horizon, which it required all his forbearance and good temper to endure. Of these qualities, so necessary in the marriage state, he certainly possessed more than an ordinary share ; and thus his life was less harassed than it otherwise would have been ; his greatest domestic trial having been that of sending his children from him.

Stuart, the eldest, left his family at a very early age, for they feared his health was suffering from the climate ; and under the care of a brother of his father's, he completed his education before

he again saw any of them ; and it was in returning from the first visit he paid to India, that his kindness, and perhaps handsome face, won the juvenile affections of Eva Herbert.

There were three more children, daughters ; and concerning their education, a fiery conflict had taken place,—the father urging his most earnest wish that they should be placed at a school in England, the mother insisting that they should be sent to France ; and it was during this debate that Mr Aylmer, for the first time since their marriage, said many harsh and even bitter things to his wife, and ended by declaring that if she chose to make two daughters as vain and frivolous as herself, she might take the consequence, but he was determined that one at least of his children should grow up without thinking it a misfortune to be an Englishwoman, and therefore Fanny, the youngest, should never, with his consent, set her foot on the shores of that country to which he imagined his wife owed most of her faults. And Mrs. Aylmer, astonished at a



warmth and firmness he seldom displayed, ceased to offer any opposition to this arrangement, and so it was decided. The two eldest girls, Isabel and Clara, were educated at a fashionable Parisian school, and Fanny, to whom the reader has been already introduced, grew up under the care of a well-informed English gentlewoman, a distant relative of Mr. Aylmer ; and the result was as the father anticipated. When his daughters joined their parents on the arrival of the latter in England, he found the two eldest as artificial and anti-English as even their mother could desire, but Fanny, his darling Fanny, more than realised his expectations respecting her. With less striking beauty, and fewer showy accomplishments, she excelled her sisters in everything where mind or disposition was concerned, and her endearing affection and constant attention to himself, soon consoled him for the heartlessness and affectation of the other two ; who affected to despise their “ignorant, dowdy” sister (these were the terms they usually applied to her) ;

and Fanny, in her turn, soon ceased to regard their praise or censure as a matter of any moment. And thus things continued up to the time of Eva Herbert's introduction to the family.

## CHAPTER IV.

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“ There’s no miniature  
In her fair face, but is a copious theme,  
Which would, discoursed at large of, make a volume.”

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EVA was awakened on the following morning, by the merry voice of her young companion of the preceding evening, who came to ask if she might take Janet’s place in assisting her to dress ; “ for,” continued the laughing girl, “ I mean to become your very shadow ; I have so longed for a person about my own age, to talk to and confide in, and to love ; for my sisters, I assure you, think it quite beneath their dignity to converse with such an unfashionable, ill-bred being as myself ; and you, I am perfectly certain, will be just the friend I have so long and ardently wished for.” And thus

she continued while Eva made her toilet, and then they descended together to a small summer-room where Fanny and her father, who were early risers, usually spent an hour or two before the rest of the family came down. Here they found Mr. Aylmer, who fondly embraced his daughter, and extended his hand to his ward; and the look of frank kindness that accompanied this action, made the latter feel that in him she should find a second uncle. The hour this little party now spent together was a very pleasant one; the grey-haired Indian merchant spoke to Eva of her father—his own old acquaintance and contemporary,—and that dear name awakened so many tender memories, that to her the time flew by unheeded; while Fanny sat contentedly gazing at the perfect beauty of her new friend. Mr. Aylmer himself was happy in the idea that his youngest and best loved daughter would no longer be without a companion, and it was with mutual feelings of regret that they saw the servant enter to announce that breakfast was

ready—Mrs. Aylmer having sent to say she would take hers in her own room, where she should, after that, be happy to see Miss Herbert. And to the breakfast-room they went, and there found the eldest Miss Aylmer, who languidly advanced to greet their new inmate, and this ceremony over, she again sank in the large *fauteuil* which she had drawn close to the fire, though it was now the middle of May, and did not condescend to open her lips again till the meal was concluded, when she asked Miss Herbert to accompany her to Mrs. Aylmer's room.

This of course was complied with, and Eva, already sufficiently disgusted with the daughter, no sooner saw the mother, than she conceived an unconquerable aversion towards her. Reclined in a *chaise longue*, elaborately dressed, and still more elaborately rouged, with a complexion on which the climate of India had left even more than its usual ravages, Mrs. Aylmer presented the idea of a person whom old age had surprised

with all the follies and vanities of youth upon her. Besides all this, there was a look of querulous discontent and ill-nature plainly depicted in her face; and as she raised it to examine that of her young guest, Eva thought she had never beheld so unpleasing an aspect.

“Well, really, Miss Herbert, I never should have recognised you again,” began this lady, after the usual compliments had passed,—“who would have thought that four years could make such a difference in anybody, thought to be sure there are my own daughters grown out of all knowledge; but then they have had the advantage of living during that time in France, which has given them a certain *air distingué* that it is quite impossible ever to acquire in this Gothic country. I presume, my dear, your education has been terribly neglected, shut up as you have been in a place where the people can be only half-civilised. Isabel shall hear you play and sing by-and-bye, and she will be able to judge what further instruction you may require. Now there is my Fanny, poor

child, her father would not let her go to France, but she is taking lessons in French and music, and you can have the same instructors ; for I suppose you would not wish to come out till you have lost a little of your rustic manners, which, however, a constant association with my daughters will soon enable you to do."

Here Mrs. Aylmer, exhausted, or feigning to be so, from having made such a lengthy speech, leant back in her chair, awaiting an answer.

Now to say that Eva was astonished at this address, would convey but a very feeble impression of the state of her mind. If the reader can understand what it is to have certain fixed opinions that have grown with his growth, and strengthened with his strength, completely overturned and set aside by a few apparently insignificant words, he may form some faint notion of her sensations while listening to Mrs. Aylmer's speech, and of the difficulty she found in framing a suitable reply. It must be recollected

that Eva Herbert had been a spoilt child, in more than the usual acceptation of the term,—for not only her immediate friends, but all who knew her, did homage to the little beauty's loveliness and fascination; she had been the idol of her own small circle; accustomed ever to hear herself lauded above all others; every change in her countenance noted and approved, every lively word she uttered that could by any effort of ingenuity be tortured into a witticism, treasured up and repeated again and again, till even praise grew irksome to her; and now to be addressed not only as a child, but an ignorant, unpolished country rustic—

“ Oh ! 'twas too much, too dreadful to endure,”—

and, in all probability, Mrs. Aylmer would have been as much astonished in her turn, at the answer her young guest was meditating, had the latter been allowed an opportunity of uttering it; for Eva's cheeks had a deeper colour than was their wont, and her eyes, usually so soft in their brightness, now flashed forth glances of any-



thing but love ; but at this threatening moment a servant came to announce that her uncle was waiting for her below, and without a word she rushed out of the room, and in a few seconds found herself again in his arms.

It would have greatly modified the wounded pride of the young heiress, could she have heard the conversation that took place on her abrupt exit from the boudoir.

“ It will be no use, mamma, began Miss Aylmer, “ you may talk yourself into a fever, that little minx will have her own way ; and upon my word, I do not see what you should be afraid of, I am at a loss to understand what papa meant about her extraordinary beauty ; why, she is nearly a mulatto in the first place,—but really Englishmen have such strange ideas on these subjects. Now in France—*ah ma belle France, que je te regrette !*—in France, I repeat, mamma, nobody would look at her twice ; there is no *tournure*, none of that “ *je ne sais quoi* ” air about her. that fascinates people of taste ;

your fears of her eclipsing us, really appear most ridiculous."

"Not half so ridiculous, Bella, as your pretended blindness to what every one must see; it is folly to deny it to ourselves,—if that girl is allowed to go into society with you and your sister, you may both of you as well sit knitting stockings by the school-room fire, as hope to get admirers. Her fortune, too, will be ten times as much as yours;—nothing could be more unfortunate than her coming just now,—so different from what I expected too!"

"And pray, mamma, if I may presume to inquire, in what do you find Miss Herbert so superior to your own daughters?"

"Don't be a fool, child; have I not enough to vex me already? you and Clara are handsome and well-bred, and accomplished;—the latter, I flatter myself, in no slight degree,—and this is owing to my unwearied perseverance in getting you sent to France,—but Eva Herbert is no common beauty; I have seen many lovely girls,

girls who have been the toasts and idols of their day, but I never saw anything to be compared to her—now do not interrupt me, Isabel, I tell you, I was quite confounded when she entered the room, for I thought little of what your father told us last night, though even that determined me to persuade her not to come out this season ; —but what, for goodness' sake, is the matter, child ?”

Poor Isabel, no longer able to contain her feelings, had burst into a passionate flood of tears.

“ Mamma, I hate her !” was all she said, as she hastily quitted the room and slammed the door after her.

And Mrs. Aylmer could with great sincerity have echoed her daughter's words ; but then it would neither have taken away one particle of Eva's beauty, nor added one shilling to her own children's dowry, and therefore the words remained unsaid ; and the prudent mother set her thoughts to work to find out the best means of

counteracting the anticipated evil effects of this new star, rising on the fashionable horizon at the same time with her own accomplished but uninteresting daughters.—But where, during this period, was the innocent subject of all this motherly manœuvring?

Eva, on parting from her uncle, had locked herself in her own room, refusing to admit even Fanny, and spent the whole morning in tears; it was not for many hours after that she even recollected the conversation she had had with Mrs. Aylmer; and when at length she did recall it, the remembrance was anything but pleasing to her. Eva was not vain, in the usual meaning of the word, but she could not avoid knowing she was beautiful; and it had occasionally occurred to her that there might be some gratification in others knowing it too; besides, as she said to herself, she had come to London for the express purpose of seeing more of society than she could do at Glandale,—it was her father's wish that she should do so; “and why,”

repeated she, "should I make myself a baby again, and spend another year in the school-room, just to please that excessively disagreeable old woman!" And then she wondered when Stuart would return, and if he was altered, and then she reflected that it might not be so tedious studying a little longer with Fanny, if he were sometimes their companion and assistant; but still she remained undecided as to the course she should pursue, when Fanny again craved admittance; this time it was not refused; and receiving permission to dismiss Janet, who had come to dress her young mistress for dinner, the intruder seated herself, and thus began:—

"I am come, dear Eva, to have a little confidential chat with you; for it is quite impossible that I can let you remain any longer alone, crying yourself into fits. I fear you will never learn to love us as you do your uncle; but you must try to be as happy as you can. Papa is most anxious about you; it would make him very uncomfortable to think that your remain-

ing here was a penance to you. I declare, Eva, I am already half jealous; he talks so much about you.—Ah, that is right: it rejoices me much to see a smile on those coral lips.”

“It would indeed be the height of ingratitude, Fanny,” said Eva, “were I insensible to your kind efforts at consolation. I have felt deeply this first parting from my uncle; but I shall soon get over it; and then you will find my gaiety, I fear, as troublesome as my sadness now; but you have something particular to speak about?”

“Yes,” replied Fanny, assuming a tone of meek gravity; “I have heard that you, or at least your countenance, all beautiful and placid as it now seems, exhibited this morning certain signs of rebellion against my lady mother, when she proffered her most disinterested advice, that you should defer your *début* till the next season and for this heinous sin I am come to take you to task.”

“Spare me, Fanny,” said Eva, “I plead guilty

to the charge. I did, for the moment, feel angry at being treated like a child, and doubtless my treacherous countenance expressed as much; but I will make my apologies so prettily, that even your mamma (who I do think dislikes me already) shall graciously extend a pardon."

"All in good time, most penitent lady; but now hear me, and in the first place you must know that papa and mama have had a sort of dispute about you this morning."

"About me, Fanny?"

"Even so; insignificant as you doubtless think yourself, you have actually been the cause of something very nearly approaching a quarrel between two people, who, to tell the truth, (for you know friends should have no secrets,) scarcely ever exchange half a dozen words together—but I am going to tell you how it happened. I was in Clara's room while you were with mamma this morning; she was recounting to me her imagined conquests of last night—though Clara is really pretty, and not near so affected as Bella,—well,

while thus employed, Isabel suddenly rushed into the room, her eyes red and swollen with crying, declaring she would not stay at home to be so treated; that all the house, including mama, had gone mad about your beauty; that herself and Clara would be despised and neglected, and a great deal more that was unintelligible, for she had again commenced crying, and it ended in a violent fit of hysterics. At this interesting moment it happened that papa was passing the door, and hearing such a violent sobbing, he came in to inquire the cause, which I was obliged to explain as well as I could. Now if there is one thing that provokes papa more than another, it is seeing a person in hysterics, which he says is nothing but French humbug—he calls all kinds of affectation and folly *French*—and though I really tried to make Bella appear as little ridiculous as possible, he got very angry, and ordered a jug of cold water to be thrown over her, and that she should be left alone; but by this time mama had heard of it, and came to comfort and condole with her injured child. From her papa insisted on



hearing a correct statement of what had passed in her room, which mama gave, together with a not very flattering opinion of your temper ; you see I am very candid with you,—and then she declared that you were much too young to come out,—that papa ought to insist (in his office of guardian) upon your studying a year with me ; by that time, she said, Bel and Clara would most likely be well married, and then—But I am not at liberty to repeat her second motherly suggestion ; it is enough to say that papa was most indignant at the idea of such manœuvring, and insisted upon her never again interfering in any way with you. He then left the room with me ; and, when we were alone, papa authorised me to repeat to you as much as was necessary of this conversation, and to add that it was his sincere wish that while under his protection you would look upon him as a father, and feel no more restraint towards him than though he really stood in that relationship to you. And for myself, dear Eva, I need not repeat that I already regard you as

a sister ; and I do hope that papa and I shall be able between us to make your residence here agreeable to you."

" You are very, very kind, Fanny, and I thank you sincerely for your candour and affection ; but how can I ever be sufficiently grateful to Mr. Aylmer for his great consideration towards me,—a stranger too,—and one whose presence has already created dissension in his family ? Oh, would," continued Eva, the tears starting to her eyes,—“ would that I had never left my happy valley !”

“ Nay this is unkind towards me, Eva ; think how much pleasure I should have missed had you never come among us ; you cannot fancy the delight I feel in having some one of my own age that I can call a friend ; you wonder, perhaps, that I speak indifferently and coldly of my sisters, that I sometimes even ridicule their follies ; it is wrong,—I am sure it is very, very wrong ;—but you know not the provocation I have had. I met them after a separation of

more than three years, with the most earnest wish to love and look up to them ; but oh, Eva, if you could have seen how every effort I made to win their confidence and love was repulsed and ridiculed, how everything I said or did was laughed at and condemned, as out of taste or old-fashioned and vulgar, you would no longer wonder, that, little by little, my feelings changed, till indifference took the place of the warmest sisterly affection ; and that I even occasionally pay back the ridicule they once so unsparingly bestowed upon me. But now that I have found a friend in you, I am so happy that I intend to be at peace with all the world, and to listen and smile most benignly whenever my charming sisters speak to me of their admirers and their conquests—which, by the bye, are the only things they ever do speak to me about—instead of turning away impatiently, as I own I have often done, and as you will be doing from me, I fear, unless I cease talking. See, it only wants five minutes to six ; I have actually been half an

hour chattering, and not allowed you to put in a word."

"Well then, Fanny, I will make up for it now; for I shall ask you to listen to me for five minutes—just while I finish dressing—without interruption. I am exceedingly grieved at having been the cause of annoyance to your kind and worthy father, as well as to Mrs. Aylmer and her daughter; and were it not that I feel I am obeying my own poor father's wishes by remaining here, I should at once return to Glandale,—nay, hear me out, Fanny: it will be no great sacrifice on my part to yield to your mama's desire, that I should study for a year with you. I am not vain enough, believe me, to suppose that my coming out now, could in any way interfere with your sisters' prospects; but since Mrs. Aylmer does me the honour to imagine so improbable a thing, I will cheerfully consent to remain for another season in the school-room; and with you, my dear Fanny, for a companion, I doubt not it will be passed quite as happily as though my time

was occupied with balls, routs, concerts, and the opera ;—by the bye, I must go to the opera ; I cannot give up *that* ; I will wear a hood or a mask, if your mama pleases ; but go I *must* ; and this is the only concession in return for mine that I shall ask.”

“ Ah, dearest Eva, if I thought it would be really no sacrifice on your part, how very happy your determination would make me ; we might then be always together, and papa will be so delighted to have another companion in the lonely evenings he spends when mama and my sisters are out. And yet,” continued Fanny, “ I think I should enjoy hearing of the admiration you would excite, if you went into society. Yes, that would be delightful ; and it might humble Clara too a little, who imagines herself a *Venus de Medicis* at least. But then there is another reason, a pet reason of my own, totally distinct from all I have mentioned yet, that makes me anxious you should not be seen too much at pre-

sent. Now you need not try to guess it ; because it is quite impossible such an idea could ever enter your head."

Perhaps Fanny was right ; yet if so, and Eva could not guess this pet idea, why did she blush so brightly, and warmly kissing her companion's cheek, whisper,—“ It is all settled, love ; I am quite delighted at the choice I have made ; so let us go and tell your papa !”

On descending to the drawing-room they found the rest of the company assembled. Eva was presented to the second daughter, and her manner was somewhat less frigid than that of the eldest had been, though at first Clara seemed rather startled at the beauty that was to rival her own.

Mrs. Aylmer's manner was also more gracious now ; and when her young guest, with the natural ease of an instinctively graceful demeanour, apologised for having quitted her apartment so abruptly in the morning, her answer was all

that could be expected or desired on such an occasion ; and as the offended Isabel did not make her appearance, something like harmony reigned amongst them. Nothing could exceed the kindness and attention of Mr. Aylmer to his ward ; and the latter soon took an opportunity of declaring to him the result of her conversation with Fanny ; to which he replied, that she was at liberty to follow her own inclinations in all things, and that no one should interfere with her.

In the course of the evening, Clara asked Eva to accompany her in a vocal duet, which the latter cheerfully complied with ; and, to the delight of Mrs. Aylmer, there was here ample room for criticism ; for though Eva's voice was sweet and melodious, it wanted cultivation and effect ; and it gave immense pleasure to the vain and ill-bred mother to point out these defects, and compare them with her own daughter's finished style. And Eva now listened pretty patiently ;

and if occasionally she did bite her red lips till they became still redder, it must not be greatly charged against her ; for the harangue was very long and tedious, and the speaker only concluded her remarks on the incalculable advantages of a French education, when her husband, with an impatient “ pshaw ! ” interrupted her, and begged that she would remember that Miss Herbert had not come to London to be lectured like a child. But Eva, who was anxious that no more unpleasantness should arise on her account, advanced with the most perfect good-tempered ease to her hostess ; and as she wished her good night, said, that being fully conscious of her own many deficiencies, she had determined on taking the kind and judicious advice that lady had proffered in the morning. Mrs. Aylmer saw not, or failed to understand, the slight curl of the pretty lip that accompanied these words ; but the look and smile of peculiar satisfaction with which they were received, made Eva fancy that some other



cause beside the one Fanny had assigned, must exist to render her not "coming out" a matter of such great interest to the selfish and designing mother. And she pondered on this, and Fanny's pet idea, long after she had retired to rest.

CHAPTER V.

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" Oh you who at lighter afflictions repine,  
Arrest your complainings and list ye to mine !"

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THE reader must now turn from the bright commencement of Eva Herbert's career, and follow the narrative into the still chamber of the dying.

On a couch near an open window overlooking the Bay of Naples, lay a lady in the prime of life, though the streaks of grey that mingled with the jet of her soft black hair, and the heavy languor of the half-closed eyelids, told too plainly that her prime was already blighted. White as marble was the sunken cheek, and thin almost to transparency, the small hand that strayed so tenderly amid the flaxen ringlets of a fair boy, who rested his head on the pillows of

her couch, and deep and fervent the look of love that beamed from those gentle eyes upon the child, as he softly whispered—"Do not send me away, mama, till Alice returns, and I will be very, very quiet."

Alas! poor afflicted one, little was such an assurance needed, for seldom was that soft, plaintive voice raised above a whisper. No inducement had that fair child to mingle in the sports and pleasures befitting his age—he was blind, and had been so from his birth. Never had those blue eyes looked on the glorious sun, or watched the growth of flowers, or marked the wonders of the earth. A sad and lonely life he would have led, but for the untiring devotion of that fond mother, whose every thought and hope was centered in her blind boy. "And this," she murmured, gazing on him now, as he clung closer to the hand that caressed him, "this alone is the bitterness of death! I could have borne all, all, but to leave my child. Alice loves him, but not with a mother's love, and she will marry,

and her husband may be harsh to him, and—" but the picture seemed too dreadful for the dying mother, and she sunk back on her pillow and wept convulsively.

At that moment, a slight, pale girl entered the room, and ran to the side of the sufferer.

"Mama, dearest mama," said she, "you are worse again! oh, why did you let me leave you this morning? let me send instantly for the doctor! And look at this basket of beautiful fruit! Nina would insist on my bringing it to you. If you could eat a little of it, I am sure it would refresh you this warm evening—and now I am going to send Margaret for Dr. C——"

"Stay, Alice love, it is needless," replied her mother,—“it is the mind, and not the body that suffers now. Sit down by me, for I have much to say to you, and, oh my children, do not blame me that I have so long concealed what I must no longer hide from you—I am dying! Nay, Alice, do not weep; to you I look for support and consolation in the approaching trial;

and you, my cherished boy, be comforted ; your sister will be kind and good to you ; she will watch over and care for your happiness as I have done. She will never leave nor forsake you, and God will reward her for it. Alice, I must exact, or rather implore a promise from you, to enable me to die in peace—but I must first tell you some particulars concerning your father and my own family, about which I have so frequently evaded your inquiries.”

“ Nay, mama, do not fatigue yourself by talking now ; when you are stronger you will tell me all, for I can think of nothing at present but your illness.”

“ I shall never be stronger in this world, my child, so listen to me now. You have often heard me speak of my father with affection and regret—but you know not all the cause I have to do so. Oh how that old man loved me, Alice ! I cannot recall it, even now, without tears of bitter self-reproach, for the misery I subsequently caused him. I had an only sister, who was one

year younger than myself—our mother had died when we were quite children—this sister was a quiet, gentle girl, and I am sure thought of nothing beyond the simple duties and amusements that occupied our calm and eventless days, in the quiet county of Cumberland, where my father's property lay. But I was of a warmer and more restless nature, and at times a feeling of *ennui* and weariness would creep over me, at the close of those long summer evenings, that to her brought such unmingled pleasure; when our father would take us to row on the lake, or make us gallop our ponies along the margin, by the side of his old grey hunter; or climb with us one of the adjacent hills, or sit delighted in the summer-house of the garden, sipping his wine, while we read to him long accounts of hunts and steeple-chases. But I soon grew impatient and disgusted with all this. I was nineteen, Alice, when I first saw your father. He had come down to Cumberland to hunt for a few weeks in our neighbourhood, and had an accident near to

our house—to which my father had him carried in a state of insensibility. During the time that Captain Norton was our guest, my father discovered that he was the son of an old acquaintance of his own, with whom he had had some disagreement which was never explained to me; but whether it was the rankling remembrance of this, or one of those strange antipathies that fellow mortals occasionally, even at first-sight, conceive towards each other, I never knew. At all events, he who till then I had never heard speak harshly of any one, took a most unaccountable, and to me it seemed, unjust aversion to Maurice Norton—and this aversion was returned tenfold by the object of it, though I guessed it not then.

“ Your father, after his recovery, lingered in our neighbourhood ; we met frequently, and soon became lovers. And now, Alice, mark well what follows. I have told you how the old man my father doated upon me, how he ever preferred me with all my wayward tempers and negligence of his comforts, to my good and quiet sister,

whose every thought was to contribute to his happiness; I knew this well, and yet, Alice, when after hearing the detail of our love, he said,—and his very lips were white,—‘Emily, if you marry that man, you will break your old father’s heart,’ I turned coldly, sullenly away, with a determination to sacrifice his feelings to my own. And I did so; I believed that after our marriage all would be made up; and my sister’s prayers, my father’s tears were disregarded, and in a few months from the time we first met, I became the wife of Maurice Norton.

“Then began my career of suffering—my woman’s lot! but I deserved it all, aye and much more, for my husband ever loved me, and thus I was spared the bitterest drop in the cup of misery, the agony of watching the decay of affection. Yes, Heaven be praised, this last and sorest trial was never mine; but there were others, other woes that wore my life away, and have at length brought me to what I am.

“My father did not curse me—I think I could



have borne that, but he gave me his warmest blessing with the farewell words, and while tears quickly chased each other down his pale cheeks, said,—oh, the words are still ringing in my mind,—‘Emily, you have chosen your own lot, may it be a happy one; and if it be so, I would not have you think of the desolate hearts you leave behind; but, oh, my child, if sorrow should ever overtake you—if you should find when too late that you have been leaning on a broken reed, then, my Emmy, come back to those hearts that have so cherished you, they will always be open to receive you.’ And more he would have added, Alice, but my husband entering at that moment, hurried me away. One hasty embrace, one fervent pressure of the hand, and the parting was over.

“Very soon I discovered how bitterly Maurice returned my father’s dislike; and though, in my husband, it was not a spontaneous feeling, but rather the result of knowing himself hated, it was no less deeply rooted on that account. His

nature was unforgiving,—I might almost say revengeful; and a few weeks only after marriage, at a time when my whole soul was devoted to him, he told me, not harshly or passionately, but with a studied calmness, that made me despair, that *as his wife* he forbade me to hold any intercourse or correspondence with my father. In vain I remonstrated, and urged the duties of a child to its parent, and that parent's unvarying love to me; all in vain; he knew his power over me, and ended by declaring I must choose between them. Oh, Alice! it was a moment of anguish—of retribution too, I firmly believe. What could I do? what would any woman who loved have done?—I renounced my father! My sister still corresponded with me, and to her I continued to make excuses for not going to see them; I could not tell the real cause,—perhaps they guessed it. However that might be, for some time she wrote less frequently, and I was happier that it was so.

“ During that period, you, Alice, were born.

How I longed, with all a mother's pride in her first-born, to show my smiling cherub to my own parent and sister! how often to myself I pictured the joy with which they would welcome you to their hearts!—but it might not be.

“ Your father gloried in his child, and we were blessed for a while. I had a small fortune which had been left to me by a godfather, and this, with my husband's half-pay, supported us in tolerable comfort, and these were my happiest, or rather least miserable days, for never could I get the parting look and words of my poor father out of my mind; they haunted me day and night,—and thus nine years passed away. At the end of that period, I received a letter from my sister, complaining bitterly of my neglect of them, and urging me, in the most earnest manner, to set off immediately for my father's house, as he was in a declining state of health, and daily, almost hourly, entreating her to send for me. Judge, Alice, of my feelings, when having shown the letter to my hus-

band, and imploring him, even on my knees, to allow me to go to my dying father, he calmly took it out of my hand, crushed it, and stamped it beneath his foot. Had there been the slightest sign of passion in what he did, I might have had hope of his relenting,—but there was none, it was cold, undying hatred; and I said not a word more. I turned away with a brain on fire. My feelings towards my husband seemed changed then, and this was the bitterest trial of all—I felt at that terrible moment that I loved him no longer, and I determined to brave his resentment, and go to my father at once. And the same evening I commenced, preparations for my journey.

“ While thus occupied, my husband entered my room, and surveyed me with astonishment. I trembled while I answered his question as to what I was doing—I trembled then, but what were my feelings when he said quietly, but with an eye that sparkled as I had never seen it before,—‘ Emily, my mother died in a mad-house,

she was thwarted by one most dear to her, and the malady, which had been for a century in her family, at this opposition broke out in her. *I was always considered like my mother !*"

"With these words he left the room; and I remained rooted to the spot where he had found me. Oh! the images of horror that rushed tumultuously through my mind during the succeeding half hour that I stood there alone. At one moment, I pictured to myself the husband I had so worshipped (and who, with all his faults, had ever fondly loved me) a raving maniac, and brought to this state by my opposition to his wishes;—it was a hideous vision; but I had never known till then that there was madness in his family, and the intelligence stunned me; the next, I saw my aged father with the damps of death upon his forehead, feebly calling on my name, and turning his dying eyes ever with a yearning gaze towards the opening door, and then sinking back again with a piteous look of despair, because I came not; and I seemed to hear my

sister's mild voice reproach me as his murderer ! and then a hundred other voices, as if of mocking spirits, repeated her words. And this is the last of that dreadful time that I remember. It was too much for me,—my brain was overwrought,—and delirium followed. I afterwards learned that I had been found in a state of insensibility, and that for several days my life was despaired of. At the end of this time I awoke as from a trance, and saw my husband bending fondly over me. When he found that consciousness had returned, he stooped down, and kissing my forehead, whispered kindly,—‘ Emily, when you are well enough, you shall go to your father.’ Oh the magic of those simple words ! From that moment my strength rapidly returned, and in another week I was ready to set out for Cumberland,—a long journey, Alice, for we lived in a retired part of North Devon, partly on account of its cheapness—for our united incomes only amounted to about three hundred a-year—and partly because my husband,

always an impetuous rider, liked the hunting in that hilly country.

“ I never knew what had wrought this change in Maurice’s apparently fixed determination. It might have been his love, and his fears for my health,—whatever it was, I cared not then. I felt my tenderness for him return with tenfold strength from this unexpected concession, and taking you with me, Alice, I started for that dear home which I had left so thoughtlessly nine years before. It was a weary journey, and sickening fears oppressed me as its close drew near. My heart bounded and sank again as I caught a first glimpse of the blue Cumberland hills.—I had not written to apprise my family of my coming, and I left you at the village inn—you may remember something of it, dear Ally—while I walked myself through the well-known fields leading to the lawn of my father’s house. No one I saw appeared to know me, and I was glad of it, for a horrible foreboding of evil was at my heart, and I could not have listened or replied to

a familiar voice, till my fears were either confirmed or dispelled. It was nearly dark when I reached the house, for I was still too feeble to walk fast. I knocked softly at the door, but no one answered it—I looked up at the windows and saw a dim light burning in one of the rooms. My fears increased, and finding the door was not fastened, I opened it and went in. The lower apartments were all deserted, and though my knees trembled so that I could hardly support myself, I managed to get up stairs. I intended to go first to my sister's room, but hearing as I passed, a slight noise in the one where I had observed the light, I entered it, and saw that the candles were burning by the side of my father's corpse !

“ Oh, Alice, think how great the sin of ingratitude to a parent must be, to require such retribution as this ! I have had many trials since, days and nights of unpitied misery, but in that one moment might have been concentrated the agonies of a life. He had died, then, in the belief of my



heartlessness and indifference towards him,—my want even of common humanity, and to such a father too ! whose life since my birth had been devoted to the study of my happiness and welfare,—whose parting words, even when I so stubbornly opposed him, had been those of the warmest blessing and affection. And perhaps he had cursed me at the last !

“ Such were the thoughts that shook my soul as I stood by the side of my father’s coffin—I had never seen death before—oh, Alice, it is an awful sight !” continued the dying woman (so repulsive to the instincts of the living, even when about to die, is death !) “ how the world, and all its cares and vanities shrink into insignificance when we look upon a body like our own, converted into a senseless clod of earth ; the soul that animated gone from it for ever, that soul which a few short days or hours before, thought, and felt, and hoped, even as ourselves.—But these ideas are gloomy ones for you, my child, and I do ill to give them utterance—for soon they will

be forced upon you. Listen now, my story is nearly told, and you shall hear my object in making you acquainted with much that I have thought it unnecessary to tell you before.

“ I was roused from my first stupifying shock of grief by a little spaniel that had belonged to my father, which was watching beside the corpse. The dog had been a pet of mine ; and now it jumped up and licked my hand, and whined piteously, still looking towards its master. It seemed to reproach me for my neglect, and to say, ‘ I have been more faithful than you ! ’ and I pushed it away, and hurried from the room.

“ I have wondered since that I neither fainted nor screamed, but instead of that I seemed endowed with unnatural energy from the moment I knew the worst. I sought my sister’s room ; and I found her there alone ; paler and thinner, it is true, than when we parted ; but with the same calm look her features had ever worn—she was examining some papers, and started violently on seeing me. I waited not for greeting, for

questions, or explanations ; but breathlessly enquired if my father had cursed me ! ‘ Emily,’ she said, ‘ your name was the last on his lips, and coupled with a blessing.’

“ How my stricken heart thanked her for those words ! I fell at her feet, and would have mingled my tears with hers, but her manner was cold and distant towards me. She did not know, she could not guess—for her nature was so calm and passionless—the agonies I was suffering, or surely she would have spoken some words of love and comfort ; but, no ! in a quiet, measured voice, she told me that our father had never been the same since my disobedience—that it preyed on his mind, and finally ruined his health ; then added to this, she said, were trials of a pecuniary kind,—a mining speculation in which he had embarked a large portion of his property, failed ; and for the last twelve months they had known some of the privations of poverty. My sister told me all this, Alice, and added, that she should be obliged, by her own exertions, to gain

her daily bread ; I implored her to give up the idea, to come with me, to share whatever we possessed ; but in vain I entreated ; her determination was fixed ; ‘ and that you may not press me further, Emily,’ she said, ‘ I will tell you my reasons. It may seem harsh to you ; but I owe it to myself.——

“ ‘ We are both,’ she continued, ‘ the children of him who lies dead in the adjoining room—he loved us, but not equally. You, Emily, were the favourite, though your affection for him was never half so great as mine ; but I was not jealous, for I knew that your manners were more calculated to inspire love than my own. I was so proud of you too ! but our natures were very different, and the best of my affections were given to our father. I could have died to secure his happiness ! Think then what I must have suffered to see him wasting day by day, yet never murmuring or reproaching you as the cause ; but I knew it was so, and my love for you diminished. May Heaven forgive me, my sister,

if I am inflicting unnecessary pain, but I must tell you that I believe your disobedience broke his heart, and I could not live with you again in sisterly love—not, at least, till time has softened this bitter remembrance. You will of course remain till after the funeral, and then we can both go our separate ways.’ Alice, this was my sister, my only relative on earth except my husband and you, who spoke thus; but I could not blame her, although every word fell like icy drops upon my heart. I knew how devotedly she had loved our father, and though she looked and spoke so calmly now, I doubted not that her sufferings were acute,—although bliss compared to mine. I said no more to her then, but returned that night to the inn, without even telling her you were there, and we did not meet again till the funeral. I knew she wished it thus, and in truth I was glad to be alone, that I might weep and pray in quiet. I think she remarked the traces of what I had suffered, on my countenance, when we met before

our father's grave ; for she stood by me and took my hand, and when the mournful ceremony was over, she offered to return with me to my temporary abode, and remain with me till I went away. Our father's house, with all that it contained, was already in the hands of trustees for his creditors—I accepted her offer, and she seemed pleased with you ; but oh how different to what I had anticipated was this first meeting between my child and my only sister ! It was clear that her affections were entirely alienated from me, and my only wish now was to get back to my husband. I thought he would not refuse to sympathize with my sufferings, now that the object of his long-cherished hatred was gone for ever from among the living ; I looked to him for comfort and support, for alas ! I had none other save my God !

“ Well, Alice, my sister and myself parted the day after the funeral ; and here I may mention that she was never enabled to fulfil her design of gaining independence by her own ex-

ertions. She died, poor thing, a few months after our father; her grief for his loss, which though so little shown was deep and lasting, hastening the progress of that fatal disease, consumption, to which she had always had a tendency.—But to return to myself. My husband received me most kindly, though he forbade any allusion to my journey, or its object. Our mourning dresses explained that there had been death—and he sought to know no more. It wanted then but a few months of the time when I expected again to become a mother, and this helped to sustain my drooping and shattered spirits, as well as to increase my husband's tenderness towards me. He would seek with eagerness for every new amusement he fancied I might like; and one day, on my expressing a wish for some book that was not to be obtained at the small town near which we lived, he declared his intention of riding a distance of fifteen or twenty miles to procure it. I was very unwilling for him to do this, as his own

horse was ill, and the one he proposed riding was imperfectly broken in ; indeed I cared little about the book, and had merely mentioned it because I would not have him suppose I took no interest in things that had formerly given me pleasure ; however, my remonstrances were vain ; he was determined on going, and he went.

“ I remember the day well, it was towards the end of summer, and I walked out with you, Ally, in the green lanes near our house ; and by and bye, we came to the village church-yard ; and I entered, and rested under the shade of a large yew-tree, while you played among the tomb-stones. The summer air was so soft and balmy ; and I felt, I remember, something like returning happiness, as I mused alone in that quiet spot. I lifted up my heart in thankfulness to Heaven that my husband and child were still spared to me ; I also thought on the one that was coming to form a new bond of love between us, and hope once more strove to find a home in my weary heart. I lingered long in the



old churchyard, for I liked the quiet sanctity of the place; and it was not till past the hour at which I might have expected your father, that I left it to go home.

“Alice, I cannot linger on the scene which follows;—in another hour from the time I quitted the churchyard I knew that I was a widow! The horse your father rode had started violently at some object, plunged and fell, throwing its rider against the iron railings of a house he was passing. The spikes entered his forehead above the eyes—and instant death was the consequence. Though they kept the body from my sight, I learned the manner in which he had been killed; and I should then have died too, I am convinced, had not the thoughts of the little life within my own, sustained me through this new and dreadful trial. But in my agony I believed that I was destined to wretchedness—that it was more than I had deserved, and I repined presumptuously, Alice, against the hand that had chastened me. Aye, and I did more than this; in the

bitterness of my spirit, I prayed in the words of the Indian mother, 'Let not my child be a girl, for very sad is the lot of woman !' I fancied that men were exempt from the worst of the trials that we suffer, and I dreaded bringing another being into the world, fated to misery. Well, Alice, my prayer was heard ; the child, to whose birth I had looked forward with so much of hope—the child who was to form a new link between my husband and myself, was born before the turf was green on that husband's grave. It was a boy—but it was blind !

"Bear with me, dear Alice, now, I cannot calmly recal the sufferings that followed, they were sufferings that cannot be spoken ; but at length after months of that despairing wretchedness which is akin to madness itself, all my feelings, all the energies of my nature that remained formed themselves into one absorbing passion—unutterable love for my blind boy. And you can testify with what constancy this devotion has continued. For his sake, I prayed for life ;

for his sake, I struggled against my failing health ; in fact, for him and him alone, I have lived ; and in this one exclusive feeling I know I have often overlooked and been ungrateful for all your patient love, my Alice. May Heaven reward you for it better than I have done !

“ And now, my child, I must come to the promise I would demand of you ; and this, I fear, will seem more selfish even than my former neglect—but I cannot die in peace without it.”

“ Tell me what it is, mama,” said the weeping girl, “ and do not fear that I shall not make it, or break it when it is made.”

“ It is this, Alice, *that you will never marry while poor Maurice lives.* I believe and trust his life will be a short one. Look at him sleeping now ! How beautiful he seems ! that rich flush on his cheek is not the hue of health : oh, no ! my angel boy will soon join me in Heaven ! but I would not leave the world in the agony of thinking that while he lives he may be subjec-

ted by strangers to cruelty or harshness. Even neglect, you know, would break his heart ; and while you remain unfettered by dearer ties, I fear not that you will fail to act a mother's part towards him. Oh, dear Alice ! by all your hopes of happiness, and as you would give peace to your dying mother's soul, sacredly, solemnly make me this promise !”

And the daughter *did* promise, and with tears and caresses implored her mother to dismiss her fears, pledging herself to study her brother's comfort and happiness in all things before her own ; and she was rewarded by a smile of peace, and a fervently uttered blessing. Alice felt at that moment there was no sacrifice which would have been too great for her to have made for that dear mother's sake ; and she sat by her side, and held her hand till she slept (for weariness and exhaustion had succeeded the unusual exertion she had made) and even then, her devoted child did not leave her, except to put little

Maurice to bed, and then she took her station, for the night, by the side of the sufferer, and very bitter were the tears that lonely and hopeless girl shed as the long hours of the silent night wore slowly away, while she watched her mother's flushed cheek and unquiet sleep.

Alice Norton was fondly attached to the only parent she had ever known, for she had been too young at the time of her father's death, to have had much communion of affection with him, and though she could not avoid perceiving that even by her mother she was by no means so dearly loved as her brother, this did not diminish her affection for either; she had long been aware that her mother's health was declining, but had never thought that death was near—and having no other relative on earth, at least none that she knew, it may be imagined what her feelings were, now that she was led to contemplate the possibility of a speedy separation. Her mother's history too had affected her so deeply that in

listening to it she had forgotten for the time that the sufferer believed her trials were about to be finished by death ; and it was not till Mrs. Norton spoke of the promise she required, that her weeping child remembered the occasion of her demanding it. And even yet she could scarcely bring herself to believe that she should really be left a desolate wanderer on the earth—or worse, with one entrusted to her, whose helplessness and affliction, while they made him dearer, rendered the charge one of tenfold responsibility ; and as Alice with a throbbing head and swimming eyes thought of all this, she felt tempted to pray that the same grave might enclose them all !

After a restless sleep of some hours, Mrs. Norton towards morning awoke, and her daughter again implored permission to send for the medical man—and this time it was not refused. For the dying woman wished to know how many days or hours she might yet have to spend with those so dear to her. And the physician arrived,

and his testimony confirmed her own previous forebodings; for though he said she might linger some days, the probability was that a few hours would end her earthly sufferings, as she appeared to have undergone some recent excitement which had hastened the progress of her disease. And the invalid listened to him calmly, though occasionally a convulsive movement, indicating some mental pain, passed over her countenance, as though while her spirit yearned to be free, some earthly feeling yet remained, clouding her joy in the prospects of that happy world to which, in faith, she believed she was hastening. And Alice, poor Alice! heard the sentence in mute despair; but even then, so devoted and self-denying was her love, that she struggled to hide all outward sign of emotion, that she might not add one pang to those which she knew her mother suffered; and guessing what thought it was that caused an expression of anguish to cloud for a moment the face whose

every movement she now watched with intense anxiety, she again hastened to repeat her assurances of devoting herself to her brother, and making his happiness in all things her first consideration—and as the fearful mother looked on the pale but animated countenance of her daughter, (while Alice reiterated the promise which had been required of her,) she could not refuse to be comforted.

“And now,” said the fast sinking woman, “my poor child, let me give you a few directions as to your future course. You know, my little remaining fortune will barely keep you both in comfort, for had you not employed your talents in teaching the signora, we should have been necessarily denied many of those indulgences which we have enjoyed since our residence here. You have often told me that Nina has pressed you to reside entirely with her as companion or friend—it matters not what it is called—and though I believe you would feel a state of dependence less



with one so attached to you as she is, than with any other, still, for many reasons, I should prefer your choosing a home in England. Now there is a person, a cousin of your poor father's, whom I have often heard him speak of, as the best and kindest of human beings—to him I would have you apply. At the time of our marriage this gentleman was in India with his family; but I once saw his son, then a mere boy, who had come to be educated in England. You were a child at the time, but I can remember your playing together, and his calling you his 'little wife.' All this, however, I had forgotten till a few months ago, when I saw in an English newspaper the arrival of the family in London; and then the thought struck me, that in case of my death, he would befriend the orphan children of his cousin, with whom I know he was once on terms of great intimacy and friendship. In my desk you will find a letter addressed to him, which you must send when I am gone. Nay, why

weep, dearest ! I shall not leave you sooner for these instructions—indeed I feel my spirit already tranquillised from having given them. I know you will find friends, my Alice—but above all do not remain in this place longer than is absolutely necessary. If the Signora Solari offer you an asylum for a few weeks, as I am sure she will do, I would not have you refuse. She is too good and noble to be unkind to any one, and for your sake she may even love my poor Maurice. The rest I must leave in the hands of Him who careth for the fatherless. The thought of this parting has been a bitter, bitter trial to me, but God has given me strength to look upon it, at length, with less of fear for your welfare, and that of my blind boy. To Heaven, in confidence, I commend my children ; and now, Alice, leave me for a few hours alone. You require rest and I need prayer ; and I would prepare myself for a last interview with my darling Maurice ; for I know I shall never see another sun arise

on earth. When I ring, you will bring my boy to me."

And the pale, weeping girl retired, as her mother desired—but not to rest; and long, long she waited for the sound of the expected summons; and having dressed her brother and sent him out with the servant, and dispatched a note to the Signora Solari—to whom she went daily to give lessons in English—explaining the cause of her absence, she crept noiselessly to her mother's room, intending again to take up her watch beside her; but a long, piercing shriek rang through the house as the daughter saw on advancing to the bed, that its occupant was no longer a being of this world! One pale thin hand was extended as if seeking for the bell-rope, but life was totally extinct. The bloodless lips had a tranquil smile which spoke of peace at the last; but Alice saw only that it was death! then sank at her mother's side almost as lifeless; and when Nina Solari, who was her sole acquaintance in Naples, entered the

room about a quarter of an hour after, she believed for some time that the spirit of the gentle Alice had passed away with that of her much-loved and only parent.

## CHAPTER VI.

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"Small is the worth  
Of beauty from the light retired,—  
Bid her come forth!  
Suffer herself to be *desired*,  
And not blush so to be admired."

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"HERE is a letter each for you young ladies," said Mr. Aylmer, one morning on entering the breakfast-room, where Fanny and Eva were already seated (the other ladies of the family seldom making their appearance before twelve o'clock); and then taking out his spectacles, he commenced reading rather a bulky packet, addressed to himself; but before the second page was half finished, Fanny, jumping up, and kissing first her papa and then Eva, told them to guess what news she had received.

“ From whom, my little Fan, is your letter ?” said Mr. Aylmer, fondly returning her embrace. “ I did not notice the handwriting.”

“ Nay, nay, I will tell you nothing ; you must either guess all, or remain in ignorance.”

“ Well, then, perhaps you have been sent the first pattern of a new cap or gown ; or maybe some unfortunate youth has seen you through the bars of your nursery window, and sent you a love sonnet, expressive of his admiration and despair !”

“ Ah no, papa, it is none of these,—you must guess again.”

“ No, saucy one, my guessing powers are exhausted,—so, come, make haste and let us hear this wonderful intelligence ; for, see ! Miss Herbert wants something to cheer her. I fear her thoughts are wandering back to the lakes and valleys she has left—or to some one dwelling there, eh ?” said the cheerful old gentleman, smiling kindly on his ward.

Eva raised her head at these words, but tears

were trembling in her eyes as she replied : " Indeed, dear sir, you are right ; my thoughts were with my kind uncle, for the letter I have received is from him ; he draws a touching picture of his loneliness, though he adds a hope that every day will lessen his regrets, and teach him patiently to bear his now solitary existence. " You, I hope," she continued, " will pardon these tears, and not think I am discontented in my present situation, because I cannot avoid sharing deeply in the unhappiness of him who has been more than a father to me."

" No apologies, my dear young lady ; we should esteem you less if you did not feel your separation from so worthy a relative ; but we must get him to come and see you when the gay season is over. I have heard of a delightful country house that is to be sold in one of the midland counties, and I think of running down to look at it ; for I hate the system of spending the winter months at fashionable watering places, in noisy hotels or comfortless lodging houses. I know Mrs. Aylmer

reckons on going to Bath or Cheltenham, but I think if I purchase this little snug estate, I shall manage to get you all there, eh Fan!—nothing like having a place you can call your own; but as I was going to say, Miss Herbert, when we are comfortably settled in the country, we shall try to persuade the good rector to take a holiday, and spend a month or two with us. What say you to this plan?"

"Oh, you are very kind," replied Eva with a faltering voice; "but you will excuse my leaving you now, I have finished breakfast, and wish to answer my letter by this post."

"Nay," said Fanny, eagerly, "just stay to hear my news, and then I will not detain you a moment longer. Now, papa, you need not assume that look of martyrdom, as though my communication would require all your forbearance to listen to; because in the first place, I know you are dying to hear it, and in the second, I know that when you have heard it, you will be ten times more excited than I am."



"Well, well, tormentor, you have done all in your power to raise the value of your intelligence, and we are not inclined to humour your love of chattering any further, so *dépêches-toi*, as Bel would say; or rather, in plain old-fashioned English, out with it."

"No vulgarisms, papa, if you please; remember walls have ears, and you may provoke another fit of hysterics. Oh do not frown, I am too happy to be serious just now; there, I declare Eva is going,—one minute, dear, only one, just to see how delighted papa will be with all his pretended stoicism. Now then listen,—Stuart, darling Stuart, is coming home next month!" and Fanny turned her laughing eyes from the suddenly flashed and animated countenance of her father (who had risen to leave the room) to that of the lately pale and dejected Eva; the latter was already at the open door, and one side only of her face was visible, as she hastily disappeared, and Fanny, wondering at the sudden hectic that had replaced the previous

paleness of that tell-tale cheek, slowly and musingly followed her companion, often smiling most complacently to herself as she thought of her pet idea. She found Eva sitting in her own room, and reading over again her uncle's letter, and "come in dear Fanny," were the words that greeted her, as she stood at the door, awaiting permission to enter.

"Do you know, Eva," she began, seating herself opposite to her friend, "I am half inclined to quarrel with your uncle for causing you to be so sad just now, when I want to talk to you about Stuart, and make you participate a little—oh it could be but very little—in the joy I feel at the thoughts of his return."

"Indeed, Fanny, you do me injustice if you imagine that I do not sincerely rejoice in everything that pleases you."

"Oh yes, of course, I know all that, but what I mean is, that I should like to teach you to love him as I do, that his return might make

you happy on your own account.—How very lovely you look when you blush, Eva !”

“ What very odd things you say, Fanny,” said Eva, blushing of course still more, and vexed and angry with herself for doing so. “ It is quite childish to talk in that way.”

“ Dear Eva ! I have offended you,—pray forgive me,” said poor Fanny, with tears standing in her eyes; “indeed, indeed, I am very sorry.”

“ What, crying, Fanny ! this is too bad ; really it appears I am doomed to make everybody in this house uncomfortable—there, there, let us kiss and be friends, as the children say. I confess to having been rather peevish this morning—come, dry your tears, and bring your drawing things in here, while I look for some work, and then you shall talk about your brother as much as you like, and teach me to love him too if that will make you happy,” she continued, stooping down to examine the contents of a drawer at the other end of the room.

And the tears were dried, and the drawing

and work-tables were placed; but it is impossible to conjecture how far Fanny might, during the long morning they contemplated passing together, have progressed in the strange lesson, or how apt a scholar Eva might have been, for scarcely had they congratulated themselves on the snug quarters they had chosen, and the quiet they were likely to enjoy, when a message came from Mr. Aylmer desiring to speak with Fanny in his own room.

On entering the little sanctum she found her father with the bulky packet he had received in the morning before him, and from which he immediately selected a letter, and gave it to his daughter to read. Having done so, Fanny laid it down, exclaiming,—“Of course, papa, you will ask them to come here immediately. Poor girl! what trials for one so young! But how is it I have never heard of these relations before?”

“In answer to your last question,” replied Mr. Aylmer, “I can only say it is probable I

never mentioned to you my cousin and old school-fellow Norton, for our correspondence had ceased entirely for many years, though I had no idea he was dead. But I think you must have heard of his wife and daughter, for Stuart saw them in England when he was quite young, and I can remember his letters being at the time filled with an account of the pretty lady, and a blue-eyed girl with whom he had used to play.—Ah, Norton was a strange fellow, some thought him half mad; and so his poor wife has gone too. She has sent me a short sketch of her history, with a view, I believe, of interesting me more on behalf of her children—but it needed not this,” continued the kind-hearted old man, with emotion,—“a young and delicate girl, with a blind brother! We must write to them directly, Fan, and get them here.”

“Oh, yes! and what a sweet, touching letter it is; and her name is Alice. How I long to see her—don’t you, papa?”

“Perhaps I am somewhat less impatient than

you," said Mr. Aylmer, smiling; "yet still I shall very gladly welcome my poor cousin's orphan children—but I am thinking how your mother will like it. You must speak to her on the subject, Fan."

"Oh, that I will; and you know there is no reason why she should object, for Alice does not tell us that she is pretty."

"And so you think your mama would have an objection to a pretty cousin, eh, Fanny?"

"To one both poor and pretty becoming domesticated with us, certainly yes; and for two reasons,—the first, lest she should eclipse Bel and Clara, and the second, and perhaps more frightful contingency, lest Stuart should fall in love with her."

"Upon my word, Miss Fanny, your penetration does you infinite credit; and so if this poor Alice turns out to be pretty, what is to be done? But perhaps you would rejoice if your brother fell in love with her?"

"Oh, indeed I should not, papa! I have

other views for Stuart—he must not, shall not, fall in love with Alice Norton ! but why do I say this ! he cannot do so, and Eva here.”

“ Ah, Fanny, have a care, and do not lend yourself to any plotting or planning of your mother’s. Remember these manœuverers always defeat themselves.”

“ Trust me, papa, I am no plotter, and know nothing of mama’s plans ; I only say, that no one could look at or think of another, when Eva Herbert was present.”

“ She is certainly a very lovely and fascinating girl ; and I hope from my heart she may find a husband worthy of her ; but now go and write to this new cousin, who perhaps may rival you all. And when we have sent the letters it will be time enough to tell mama and sisters—eh, Fan ?”

“ An excellent idea, papa ; for then when the invitation is given, it will be too late to raise objections—but what shall I say to Alice ?”

“ Whatever your kind, little heart dictates,

Fanny; I am sure you need no instruction in this."

"Well, then, *adieu mon père*," said the light-hearted girl, as she opened the door, laughing and gaily shaking her head, as Mr. Aylmer called her back to repeat:

"Remember, when Stuart comes, I'll have no plotting, no plotting, Fan."



CHAPTER VII.

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“ Well the red robe folded round her  
Suits her stately mien,  
And the ruby chain has bound her  
Of some Indian queen.  
Pale her cheek is, like the pearl,  
Heavily the dusky masses  
Of her night-black hair,  
Which the raven’s wing surpasses,  
Bind her forehead fair.

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THE evening sun of an Italian May was shining brightly on the pinnacles of the white marble villa of Solari, sparkling off the diamond light from their chiselled edges, and giving the repose of verdant beauty, to the cool shadows which the dark glossy leaved shrubs of the surrounding gardens cast upon the lighted spots; and deep in a grove of tall orange-trees, pallisaded along its trimly kept sweeps by pruned rows of fra-

grant myrtles, there was a rose-garden with a fountain in the midst ; and though unseen in the aspect of the spot, a grotto of shells from the Bay of Naples, thickly tufted over with white magnolias and many of those beautiful creeping plants, which though the Italians reckon weeds, they still suffer to grow among their more favoured shrubs—partly, perhaps, on account of the effect which their multicoloured blossoms have on those tiny thickets, and partly, maybe, because there is a charm which southerners alone seem to feel, in the indiscriminate grouping of the beautiful, a harmony, which as it approaches the nearest to nature's, is only appreciated by the warmest and most refined tastes ;—and in this grotto two ladies sat conversing together, one the Signora Solari, a rich and youthful widow, and mistress of the fair domain that surrounded them, and the other Alice Norton, the poor and almost friendless English girl.

The contrast in their appearance was as marked as that in their circumstances and pros-

pects—both were beautiful, but the beauty of the former was of that character which charms the imagination, and partially subdues the heart at once, while that of the other had the gentle English tone of unobtrusive worthiness, the charm of which must be sought for to be found.

Soft and melodious was the signora's voice, as she said, playfully laying her small hand on her companion's mouth,—“Nay nay, *cara mia*, I will believe no more of your traitorous expressions of friendship, while you are all the time meditating an act of the greatest hostility to me. But no ! Alice, it is too cruel to talk of leaving me, when I have learned to be happy in your society alone. Where will you find a friend to love you and that darling boy better than I have done ? Indeed, Alice, I cannot part with either of you.”

“Dearest Nina,” said Alice gently, “do not add to the pain you know I feel in going, by supposing that I would do it voluntarily. The letter I received this morning from my father's cousin, in reply to mine, leaves me no choice but

to obey poor mama's instructions. It is written in the very spirit of kindness, offering not only a home, but to send some one to take me there immediately ; for he says we must not travel alone. He excuses his wife's not writing by telling me she has bad health. A sweet, kind, little note from one of his daughters is enclosed, so full of affection and sympathy, oh, dear Nina, it would be impossible for me to refuse going, though I know I shall never love any one as I love you, or be so happy anywhere as I have been here."

" Ah, *amica*, you think so now, but I sincerely trust there is very much happiness in store for you in your own beautiful land. You know I am almost English in heart ; but now the thought of your leaving me has dispelled my delightful visions of future romance, in which you were to be the fortunate heroine. I wish I knew this terribly worthy and amiable cousin of yours, whose written eloquence can lure you, and I half fear your heart too, from me and Italy, to strangers and your native England !"

"It is not my cousin's eloquence, Nina, that takes me from one to whom I owe such countless obligations. His kindness certainly renders the task of obeying my poor mother's death-bed command, less bitter than it appeared,—yet nothing but the sacredness of a duty which seems to call on me from my mother's grave, could make me leave the only friend I really know that I possess. Oh, if you knew the shrinking sensations I feel at the thought of meeting strangers, of coming among them as a dependant—the 'poor cousin' with her blind brother—how I think of the slights and mortifications to which I shall be subjected," continued Alice, the tears starting to her eyes—"how I shall lose my self-respect, bit by bit, and perhaps be no more worthy to be called your friend;—and more than all that, the misery I experience at the thought of exposing poor Maurice to hardships or neglect—and all the thousand fears I have at struggling with a world of which I know so little, you would not speak so lightly, or believe that my

task was a pleasant one. But," continued Alice, smiling though her tears, for her quick-hearted friend now displayed emotion equal to her own, "as for your dreams of romance, surely, dear signora, you with your beauty and brilliant position are a much more interesting subject for a heroine, than a poor outcast orphan like me."

"Ah, Alice! *non è tutt'oro quello che luce!* a smiling face, or a merry laugh, is not always a true index to the feelings which they ought to represent. You look surprised, my Allee—you see fortune smiling on me, and believe that my lot is happier than your own; but, Alice, could we read the hearts of many who carry with them into the world an aspect of gaiety, we should shrink with horror from the contrast."

"It may be so, signora, but you surely are not one of these?"

A burning spot appeared upon the signora's cheek, and it was with an effort that she said,—  
"At present, my sweet Alice, let us rather

“speak of your prospects. And,” continued the dark-eyed Italian, resuming her wonted gaiety, “let me see,—instead of a noble of Naples, poor, proud, passionate and changeful, I must picture for you now, a wealthy English squire, with a plain house, furnished like a palace, a wide green lawn, gardens with fragrant flowers warmed by steam ; a deer park, a court of long-chimneyed offices,—nature, in short, kept from agriculture by stone walls, only to be tortured into a constrained species of abandonment much more artificial ; large dinners in a fine old weary hall, covered round with portraits of red-faced men in red waistcoats, brown closely curled wigs, and galvanised attitudes ; and plump shepherdesses holding apples in one hand, and with the other patting the heads of bleating lambs, with blue ribbon round their necks. Then—nay, Alice, I know your England well—after dinner, to meet again in your drawing-room, all mirrors and no taste, a crowd of flushed men in blue coats and white waistcoats, standing round your

harp with small cups of coffee in their immense hands, while you play the dear, wild, passionate music of Italy, which you and I love so well, without a heart about you to feel its glory!—to be insulted by their applauses, and hear now and then a talking miss, juvenile and blooming—but of the youth and bloom of a coarse beanstalk—observe, amid much ill-concealed applause, that she hates outlandish airs, and that a good English ballad is better than all the music of Italy; or,—nay, hear me, Alice,” continued the signora with sparkling eyes, which showed that her gaiety was produced from none of the usual causes of gaiety,—“perhaps a clergyman would suit my Allee better—with a rectory, a fond and inoffensive husband in black, and a whole host of pretty children with white pinnafores—a velvet cushioned pew, a long-tailed-poney drawing an old carriage rumble set upon two wheels,—”

“For Heaven’s sake, cease, Nina; I have no heart to reply to these raileries—”



“Nor have I,” said the signora, suddenly changing to mournfulness, “any heart to utter them.”

A few moments of silence ensued, which was broken by Alice, whose thoughts had reverted anxiously to her blind brother, and she left her friend after promising to rejoin her in the saloon.

And Nina Solari sat in her summer grotto alone, and before her lay the luxuriant rose-garden with its snowy fountain tossing feathery jets to fall with refreshing sounds of watery coolness, on the restless splashing of the tiny flood in the marble basin below,—and around the spot were sunny sweeps of garden landscape, with shady gravelled paths that led to rich orange-groves in the valleys, and warm vineyards on the hills, and all this fairy domain her own!—every point in the gentle scene seeming tributary to the chaste, white villa which stood upon a lawn studded with flower-beds, though no plant dared to climb upon its marble walls; but a deep grove of

surly cedar-trees cast their shadows between it and the sun; and its long open windows, through their puckered green gauze, took the cool breath of the landscape in—everything telling of wealth, ease, and luxury, those means of increased enjoyment to the happy, to the free of heart, to those with whom life's blossoms are still unwithered, or whose path in the world is as yet a path of pleasantness and peace—but Nina Solari, young, beautiful, and surrounded with all the luxuries which fortune could procure, and mistress of a scene decked out in studied loveliness, felt no gladness in the contemplation of it, but on the contrary, its aspect had a quiet mockery to her feelings, which ministered only to bitterness and discontent.

And to those who measure happiness by conditions of fortune, and even more personal advantages, this will seem stranger when it is told that although the Italian widow lived in a state of seclusion, it did not exclude her from the attention of the world—she was the envy of one half

of Naples, and the admiration of the other. Many a young cavalier's heart beat fast and hard when the widow's glossy English carriage, with its English-groomed, proud-stepping bays, rolled along the glittering promenade ; and many of the richest and noblest of that ancient city would have yielded their liberty without a sigh, and some of them maybe would have perilled their lives, had it needed, to share the heart, rich lands, and deserted palaces of Nina Solari.

It was rumoured that she had refused two or three princes and a whole host of counts (to say nothing of numbers of intermediate ranks) since her husband's death, which had taken place six months after their marriage ; but whether or not this were true, certain it is, that the lady looked coldly and unlovingly on all who approached her in any more tender relation than that of friend. Of female acquaintances too, she had few ; her sorrows, whatever they were, needed no confidant to soothe them ; and by many she was esteemed both haughty and repel-

ling. But the heart alone knoweth its own bitterness, and Nina knew that hers was of a nature that even sympathy might not ameliorate. An aunt of her late husband, a needy Frenchwoman, she always kept with her ; but her only intimate friend was Alice Norton. They had met about a year previous, when the mother of the latter first came to reside near Naples for the benefit of her health. After some slight acquaintance, Nina expressed a wish to take lessons in English from Alice—an unnecessary study, it might have seemed, for the signora spoke English with the fluency of a native—and Alice was but too happy to avail herself of any means of adding to her suffering parent's comfort. And the intimacy between Nina and Alice grew rapidly into mutual friendship of the sincerest kind.

The forlorn girl on the death of her mother had accepted the signora's earnest offer of a temporary home for herself and her blind brother ; Nina, as has been seen, wished it to be a permanent one, but the afflicted daughter had obeyed

her mother's injunctions of writing to her cousin, the answer had arrived, and the friends were about to part.

And had Alice seen the beautiful Nina as she now sat alone in that little grotto, she would have no longer doubted that the signora's heart was ill at rest. The small white hands were clasped, and the dark eyes raised as if in silent prayer; but in that pale face there was none of that expression of holy resignation which usually follows a supplication to the throne of mercy. A deeper despondency gathered over the features, and burning tears trickled heavily down; then with something of passionate desperation rather than of meekness, she took out of an embroidered bag that lay near her, a small plainly bound book—it was an English Bible.

And Nina read on, seeming to forget that the evening dews were falling and the shadows deepening around her; she read on, but still the expression of her face changed not; and when at length she joined her friend in the saloon, Alice

started at observing her almost ghastly paleness, and anxiously enquired if she were ill. "No, no, *amica*," replied Nina nervously, it is the glare of the lights that makes me appear more pale than usual; and, Alice," she continued in a strange unnatural accent, "let me give you a piece of advice to take into the world with you: if ever you are burdened with a secret sorrow, if ever your poor little heart weeps over the departure of hopes too fondly cherished, then is your time to laugh and be merry; aye, laugh my pretty Alice, even if those very heart-strings crack in the effort to deceive!"

And Nina's own laugh as she spoke, sounded in the ears of her astonished companion, like some wild and fearful prophecy of evil.

CHAPTER VIII.

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"Thou lov'st another then?"

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A MONTH had elapsed, and the reader must come down with us to Elm Court, which was the name of the country seat that Mr. Aylmer had purchased in the romantic county of Derbyshire, and whither the family had gone before the season was over, on account of the ill health of the second daughter, Clara. Such at least was the ostensible cause of their sudden removal; but there were people spiteful enough to say, that the young lady's indisposition was only feigned when she discovered that the estate of a certain gentleman, whose attentions, to quote her own words, were "most marked and unequivocal," adjoined the property her father had

recently purchased ; and affairs in the country requiring the lover to “quit the gay and festive scenes” of London for a time, the object of his affections had deemed it expedient—so said these ill-disposed persons—to share his retirement. To effect this, she had been forced to declare herself unable any longer to bear the fatigues and dissipation of a London season ; and Mr. Aylmer, too happy to get into the country by any means, instantly ordered the removal, congratulating himself on his prompt measures, when he perceived Clara’s bloom not only return, but increase. And indeed no one could have doubted the efficacy of the Derbyshire air, had they seen the fair invalid only a week after her arrival, galloping over the hills by the side of Sir Marmaduke Digby, on the beautiful Arabian he had trained for her especial use.

There was not one of the party who did not share Clara’s satisfaction in their change of abode, for Isabel (who doubtless would have murmured) was left behind with a friend who had



lately married a French count ; and the wife understanding but very imperfectly her husband's language, and he not being able to speak a word of hers, Isabel, to her own perfect gratification, (for by her fluent knowledge of a foreign language she hoped to excite that admiration which her appearance had failed to do) was frequently, even in society, made the interpreter between them ; and the novelty of the thing did certainly for a time attract attention—and if the length of the conversations between the gay *sposo* and his wife's accomplished friend, were occasionally rather longer in the original than in the translation to the wife—what of that ? It was not to be expected that anybody could remember every word ; besides, frequently a remark or explanation required fuller verbiage in one language than in the other—so at least said Isabel, when her friend one day laughingly chided her indolence in curtailing so many of these conversations, which consisted professedly of remarks and sentiments intended for the especial edification and amusement of the

wife. But if she was satisfied, no one else had a right to complain; and as no one *did* complain, they all got on very comfortably together.

One evening, about a fortnight after the family were settled in Derbyshire, Fanny and Eva had left the dining-room before the others, and were in the green-house gathering some of the choicest flowers. An expression of excitement and impatience was plainly visible on Fanny's countenance, as she paused every now and then in her occupation, and seemed to listen attentively for some expected sound. Her companion continued quietly gathering the geraniums and heliotropes without any display of emotion, although a very close observer might have fancied there was an unusual abstractedness in her manner too, as though her thoughts were wandering far from the rare exotics that she plucked so lavishly. For some time both were silent, but at length Eva turning to Fanny, said, "I think it will be a pity to pull more of these beautiful flowers now, for it seems very probable the travellers will not arrive this

evening, and the flowers look so much better when they are perfectly fresh."

"Now, Eva, I am sure you say that to tease me!—not arrive, indeed! Did not Stuart in his last letter say positively that they would be here to night—and what can prevent it! but of course you do not care, he is not your brother, and you feel no interest in my poor cousins."

"And have I really succeeded at last in making you angry with me, Fanny! I had begun to think it was impossible to put you in a passion, but that frown is positively terrific. Now what would you have me do or say! Supposing I did bring myself to the same state of unhealthy excitement you are in, would that make the postillions drive faster, or amend the state of the roads?"

"Oh, but it is provoking to see you so calm, and to hear you talk so philosophically about the state of the roads and all that, when you know I am absolutely dying with impatience to see my brother and cousins,—but hark! I am sure that is a carriage now."

"Yes, I see," said Eva, returning from the green-house door, "it is Sir Marmaduke Digby's curricula."

"Oh how sick I am of that man! I never hated any one so much as I do him—he is positively odious."

"I think, Fanny, everybody is odious to you this evening; any one would suppose you were expecting a lover instead of a brother you scarcely know, a cousin you have never seen, and a gay widow that you expect only to laugh at."

"Do not talk to me about lovers, my sisters have sickened me of the very name. I would not have a lover for the world—but it is no use worrying myself to death. You see these dear people will not come a bit the quicker for it."

"That is just what I have been endeavouring since eight o'clock this morning to impress upon your mind; besides, it may be that they are less impatient for the termination of their journey than we are."

"Than *I* am, you mean, Eva; but why should you suppose that my brother, at least, is not anxious to get home?"

"I suppose nothing, Fanny; I merely suggested the possibility of their enjoying each other's society so much, as to lose sight of the tediousness of the journey."

"Ah, now I understand! You mean that Stuart and Alice may have fallen in love with each other—but that is very unlikely; you know they are cousins! Besides, if Mrs. Jeremiah Nathan is the person papa has described her, they will have had little opportunity of even exchanging a word together."

"What a nuisance such a woman must be to a quiet, timid girl, such as I imagine from her letters this poor Alice to be. I dare say she has been nearly worried to death by the widow's fears and fancies during the journey."

"Indeed I am afraid so, and that was why papa, having heard of her coming, and fixed upon her as a chaperon for Alice, wrote to Stuart

begging him to take Naples in his way home, and escort the two ladies to England."

"I am really curious to see this amusing widow; I think you said she was an old school-fellow of your mama's?"

"Yes, and through her inveterate love of letter-writing, which I understand is only equalled by her passion for talking, mama learned that she was making a short stay at Naples, and then papa wrote immediately to ask her to take charge of Alice and her brother to Derbyshire, and pay us a visit herself at the same time."

"Which of course she was very willing to do."

"Doubtless, for I have heard papa say that in India, after she was a widow—you know she went out there at the same time with mama, and got married to a rich Jew—she was continually paying three-months' visits, or rather visitations, to all her acquaintances. My sisters recollect her, but I was quite a child at the time she left India, so she will be as much a stranger to me as to you."

“ Well, but after all, it was very fortunate her being in Naples just at this time, otherwise your cousin would have had to wait till some one could be found to go for her.”

“ Yes, but I am tired of this worthy lady. Let us rather speak about her companions. I declare, Eva, you have never told me yet, if you think you will recollect Stuart, or how you liked him.”

“ Oh, of course I liked him, as all children do those who are kind to them ; but I cannot say whether I shall recognise him again or not.”

“ No, but have you never thought of him since, never felt any wish to see him again, and all that sort of thing, you know?”

“ Really, Fanny,” said Eva, bending very low, as if suddenly struck with the beauty of a flower near which she had been standing for many minutes, “ I don’t know what you mean ; but I want to ask you some more questions about Mrs. Nathan—she is very rich, I suppose?”

“ Oh, you hope to become her heiress do you,

Miss Eva ? How avaricious of you, already the possessor of so many thousands—but if this is the secret of your interest in the Israelite's widow, let it cease at once, for know that her husband left her a very small annuity, and the rest of his enormous property for the endowment and building of synagogues. However, with the little she possesses, she has contrived to travel over half the globe, making acquaintances and gaining admirers wherever she goes—so say her letters at least—I think mama gets one every three weeks. And now are you satisfied, or shall I furnish you with any further particulars respecting this object of your sudden interest ?”

“That will do for the present, Fanny ; at any rate it has amused your mind. I was afraid you would bring yourself into a fever by the excitement you manifested half an hour ago.”

“How kind of you, Eva, to have such a tender care for my health ; but now let us go and arrange these bouquets in my cousin's room.”

And, blooming as the fair flowers they carried,



the two girls left the green-house together. They had ascended the hall-steps, and were entering the house, when Fanny once more fancied she heard the sound of wheels, and seizing Eva by the hand, she hurried her down the steps and along the carriage sweep, till they came in view of the family travelling coach, which had been sent as far as the first stage to meet the expected party. Eva would have retired, but not having heard the sounds that had attracted her friend's attention, she was ignorant of Fanny's purpose in forcing her down the path, and before she could ask an explanation, the vehicle was in sight, and in another moment Fanny had stopped the horses, opened the carriage-door, and sprang lightly in. "My brother!" "My dear sister!" was all the embarrassed Eva heard, and then they all descended together, except Mrs. Nathan, who said she never walked a step further than was absolutely necessary. The several introductions were gone through. Fanny welcoming her young cousins most

warmly ; and then Eva linked her arm in that of Alice, leaving the long parted brother and sister to walk alone ; the nurse Margaret followed with little Maurice, and thus they proceeded to the house.

Alice Norton was very pale, and the expression of deep sadness on her young countenance was most touching and interesting, and Eva, as they walked side by side up the avenue, mentally exclaimed, " He *must* love her !" and then she cast one hurried glance towards him, the hero of all her girlish dreams, and she thought that the question, " Does Alice love him in return ?" was needless.

As soon as Fanny and her brother were a little in advance of the rest of the party, the former said eagerly, " Now tell me, Stuart, is she not as beautiful as I described her ?"

" Who, Fanny ?"

" Who, why who could it be but Eva Herbert — my Eva, the Eva of all my letters, my own sweet, darling friend !"

“ Really my dear, little, enthusiastic sister, I have scarcely had time to notice Miss Herbert. I remember her a very lovely child, and I doubt not she is all you have told me ; but you surely would not have me look at or think of a stranger, the moment of my arriving at the home from which I have been nearly all my life away ? ”

“ No, no, dear Stuart ; you are right ; but you see I am as giddy and thoughtless as ever. But what of our poor uncle—does he continue better ? ”

“ He does, or I could not have left him even now. Surely you are all aware that nothing but the extreme danger he was in, at the time that our family became reunited in England, would have kept me a moment from you ; the instant that danger was pronounced over, I hastened home, and here I am with my heart and time entirely free, to devote to those dear ones from whose affections I feared my long absence had almost excluded me.”

“ Dear, dear Stuart ! ” said Fanny, her eyes

filled with joyful tears, "how little you knew us! Ah, there comes papa; I dare say he has landed Mrs. Nathan and sent her to mama—hasten to him, I know he will prefer seeing you first alone."

And Fanny left her brother to follow her counsel, and turned back to welcome again her young and interesting relatives.

Eva had already given her companion a slight sketch of her new cousins, and was concluding with an animated eulogy on Fanny; when the latter joined them, to whom Alice frankly and gracefully held out her hand, saying, "Miss Herbert would have taught me to love you, my dear cousin, had not your own kind and affectionate letters already done so. I shall bring but a sad face, and sadder heart into your circle, but I am sure you will bear with me for a time. I think I could even be happy again," continued Alice, her eyes filling with tears (answering to the looks of sympathy her companions bestowed upon her.) "I might be comparatively happy again, were it

not for my poor brother ; but he pines day by day." And she turned and directed their attention to the flushed and emaciated cheek of the little boy, who, wearied by his journey, had fallen asleep in the nurse's arms. Fanny and Eva, though both struck with the child's almost dying look, strove to give hope to the anxious sister ; and by this time they had reached the house, where the rest of the family were assembled. Alice was hastily presented to all, for Fanny saw how much the timid girl shrank from strangers ; and saying she herself would take charge of her cousins, and be responsible for their appearance in an hour's time, she walked off, accompanied by the sister, brother, and nurse.

Eva, who considered that any one not of the family must be *de trop* in such a meeting as this, was about to retire too, but she caught a glance, in passing to the door, of Mrs. Nathan's face, the expression of which rivetted her attention. That lady had a habit, probably contracted from having been since her widowhood a great deal alone,

of repeating first to herself anything she proposed relating, and as her communications generally partook largely of the marvellous, the effect of this was often very singular. For instance, if it was a tale of scandal she proposed astonishing her hearers with, she would move her lips and put on exactly the same expression of countenance as though she were actually telling it aloud ; and then not content with rehearsing her own part, she would imagine the looks of her auditors, and with her own features exhibit the different emotions of indignation, incredulity, and all the rest, that such a tale might be expected to call forth. And now each member of the family being too much occupied with Stuart, to give her any opportunity of indulging her favourite propensity of talking, she had employed her vacant time in going over to herself various scenes with which it was her intention to entertain her hosts, as soon as their interest in their long absent relative had a little subsided—herself being always the prominent figure in the graphic pic-

tures she drew. At the moment when Eva caught the expression of the widow's face, she was in the midst of a rehearsal of a proposal of marriage, that, as she afterwards told her friends, had been made to her by an Italian count in a diligence between Paris and Bolougne—and the look that particularly attracted Eva's notice, was that of the aforesaid count, when the fair object of his sudden passion had peremptorily declined his hand and heart. It seemed to express something between profound despair and vehement supplication, and might have suited well enough the half-starved countenance of an Italian adventurer, but, exhibited on the highly rouged and full-moon face of the buxom widow, the effect was ludicrous in the extreme ; and Eva for a moment thought, by the contortion of her features, that the good lady was going into a fit, and anxiously advanced to enquire if she was ill. Having her fears dispelled, she was again about to retire, thinking that Mr. Aylmer had far from exaggerated the peculiarities of the Jew's widow, when the latter,

thanking Miss Herbert for the solicitude she had manifested, entreated her to take a chair near her own, which Eva was forced to do. And during the space of half an hour, while the rest of the family were eagerly conversing in a distant part of the room, did the young girl sit listening to her companion's latest adventures by land and by sea. Once or twice, in the course of her penance, Eva's eyes wandered to where Stuart sat, the centre of an animated and happy group; for even Mrs. Aylmer, with all her callous worldliness, had still one corner of her heart devoted to that holiest of earthly feelings, a mother's love and pride in her first-born. And eagerly now were questions asked and answered amongst that happy circle, for Fanny too had joined them, (Alice having expressed a wish to be left alone,) and her clear, joyous laugh rang merrily through the lighted room.

On one occasion as Eva's looks were directed that way, she perceived Stuart's eyes bent upon her, and humility itself could not have failed



to remark, that the most vivid admiration was pictured in his glance; a blush, warm and bright, dyed her cheek as she turned to listen more complacently to her companion's never-ending stories. Mrs. Nathan, without remarking her listener's agitation, went on as briskly as before, till Eva growing quite bewildered with the innumerable multitude of French conquests and French caps, Italian lovers and midnight serenades, the like of which not all the romances she had read had ever furnished her with, turned her eyes oftener in an opposite direction, which the widow at length perceiving, suddenly exclaimed, "Ah, I see where your thoughts are, Miss Herbert,—can't deceive me, my dear—was always wonderful for my penetration. I have been talking to you so much about love and lovers that you think it high time you had one yourself, and so you are looking at Mr. Stuart to see how you should like him."

"Really, madam," began her indignant listener,—but it was no easy matter to stop the widow, who continued :

“ Oh, don't be angry ; all very natural—I was just the same myself,—girls will be girls, you know ; and Mr. Stuart is as fine a young man as you would wish to see ; but to let you into a bit of a secret, I suspect he has fallen in love with his pale-faced cousin ; a poor, puny thing she is ; but there's no accounting for taste. However, *n'importe*, my dear, he's not the only man in the world, and you are too pretty to sigh for a lover long.”

Embarrassing and indelicate as Eva would at any other time have considered the latter part of this speech, it now fell unheeded on her ear, which still echoed with the words, “ He has fallen in love with his pale-faced cousin !”

The family group now began to disperse, and Mrs. Aylmer advancing to Mrs. Nathan, apologised for having neglected her so long ; and while she was making her excuses, Eva escaped unobserved, and quickly dismissing Janet—who was disappointed in her not being allowed to speak to her mistress about “ the beautiful

young gentleman," as she always persisted in calling the companion of their voyage,—sat down to compare the hero of her musings in the lonely glen, with Stuart Aylmer as he now appeared. And it may be inferred that the comparison was not much to the disadvantage of the latter, for her last mental exclamation was—and a deep sigh accompanied it—"I would I were that pale-faced cousin!"

CHAPTER IX.

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"I do not wish thy heart were won ;  
Mine own, with such excess,  
Would, like the flower beneath the sun,  
Die with its happiness !"

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THE summer months flew swiftly by to the youthful party assembled at Elm Court ; who now noticed with regret that the trees began to assume a darker shade, the wind to blow with a more hollow sound, and the evening shadows to steal less imperceptibly upon the earth. They had been happy months to most of the party, for Stuart's presence seemed to have brought with it a charm to scare away the spirits of gloom and ill-humour ; even Mrs. Aylmer, formerly so cold and haughty, now smiled graciously and often, and had twice made her appearance at the

nine o'clock breakfast ; and Clara (although *her* happiness scarcely needed any increase, she being on the point of marriage with Sir Marmaduke Digby) was thought to be more lively and natural since her brother's return. The happy father idolised his boy, and daily blessed his lot in possessing a son so worthy of his love. And even Alice—the pale and drooping Alice—raised her meek face and soft blue eyes, and smiled when he approached ; and the sickly little Maurice, who rarely spoke to any save his sister, would fondly climb on his knee, and stroke his face caressingly, fearing no harsh or unfeeling rebuke. Not that any portion of the family was unkind to him ; poor child ! none could be so ; but with a timidity natural to his situation, he had shrunk from their advances till they grew weary of making them, and by tacit acknowledgement he was now unnoticed, except by Stuart, for whom, since their journey together, the blind boy had imbibed the most lively affection ;—and by degrees the child's colour came again, and his little

thin cheek grew round once more, and the devoted sister, in her heart, blessed him whose constant kindness she believed had mainly contributed to this happy change.

And Eva ? It cannot be imagined that she, whose heart was already prepossessed in favour of the object of her childish fancy, could look with indifference on him whom all loved and honoured. It will be remembered that she had early made up her mind from her own, assisted by Mrs. Nathan's observations, that Stuart was in love with his cousin ; and though nothing since in his conduct had occurred to sanction his conclusion, and it was consequently dissipating, still there were moments when the idea obtruded itself, casting uncertain darkness over her happiest visions of the future. But the present time was not one for much reflection to Eva ; it became more and more bright and joyous—for in all their parties he was by her side. If they walked or rode, or sailed, or danced where Eva was, there Stuart was ever to be

found; and Fanny, bright, gay, loving Fanny, saw her pet scheme advancing, without any contrivance on her part; and so wisely left the seeming lovers to themselves. And already she had decided on the bride's dress, and had invented a peculiar pattern for the mignonne boxes in which the wedding-cake was to be sent to their various friends. But the autumn was coming, and their rides and walks were shortened, and Stuart spoke of returning to Italy, as his uncle's health was again delicate, and the invalid's letters to the nephew urged him to return. Yet still neither her brother nor her friend had hinted to her anything of their sentiments to each other, and Fanny thought the delay very ridiculous, and wondered what they meant by it. And Mrs. Aylmer, now that everything respecting Clara was settled, began to look anxious too, whenever Eva or Stuart came into the room where she was; and composed her features into an expression of pleased attention, as though she expected some communication of im-

portance—for her cherished wish was also that her son should marry the nabob's wealthy heiress. But time wore away, and in spite of Mrs. Nathan's repeated assurances that she knew everything was settled between the presumed lovers, the plotting mother fretted at the delay; and country baronets and squires who appeared to seek the honour of Miss Herbert's hand, were dismissed—but without a blessing. Eva saw them come and go, with the same feeling of indifference; for her position as an heiress she knew would often subject her to such overtures, even supposing she had been as devoid of personal attractions as she was gifted with them; so those preferences gave her no pleasure, and only by the contrast, made her heart's idol appear more worthy to be loved.

And Stuart Aylmer was truly so; a highly cultivated mind, united with the modesty of sterling talents, and an early knowledge of the world, had improved his character, while they had done nothing to impair the warmth and freshness of his



feelings, or the noble impulses of a proud and manly heart. His manner too was natural and prepossessing, and no one could doubt that he was deserving of the dark-eyed, wealthy Eva, whom fate now made his future bride.

But "Time is on the wing," and things still remain in the same position at Elm Court, except that Alice grows paler and thinner, and refuses oftener to join her consins in their morning excursions and evening parties. It was on one of these occasions, that she had resisted their solicitations to leave her own room ; and alone she sat by the side of her sleeping brother's couch, listening to the joyous sounds of mirth that ascended from the rooms below. A book was on her knee, but the pages were blotted with her tears ; and though she turned the leaves over, and even occasionally read a few lines, it was so mechanically, that no word of them rested for a moment on her mind. Suddenly a light footstep sounded on the stairs, and the mourning girl hastily dried her tears and pulled down the

blinds, that the traces of her grief might not be observed, and in another moment, Fanny all smiles, entered the room.

"Alice," she began, "oh do for once change your mind and come down stairs; you cannot imagine how much we want you; Mrs. Nathan is teaching us a new French game, and one other person is necessary to its proper performance. We are all dying with laughter, and really you must come." And Fanny gently tried to pull her cousin from her seat.

"I am very sorry, dear Fanny, to refuse anything you ask, but indeed Maurice is very feverish to-night, and he may awaken and want me. I cannot leave him."

"Nonsense, Alice, cannot Margaret sit and watch by him as well as you? It is *not* that, but you do not like our society." And Fanny pouted as she continued, "I said you would not come, but Stuart was so positive you would if—"

"Did your brother say so?" demanded Alice quickly—and for a moment, a tinge of colour came to her pale cheek, only to leave it whiter

than before. Then on her companion's silent affirmative to her question, she rose from her seat, adding, "Certainly, Fanny, if you wish it so much, I will come, and send Margaret to my brother."

But Fanny no longer wished it so much, or indeed at all; she had watched with surprise the change in Alice's countenance on the mention of Stuart's name, and a new light suddenly broke upon her. She fancied she had made a discovery which was anything but pleasing—and a hundred trifling incidents crowded at once upon her memory, all tending to confirm her forebodings that Stuart was loved by her cousin. And can it be possible," she thought, "that he returns her love?" "And this fear made Fanny look coldly and strangely upon poor Alice, who unconscious of what was passing in her companion's mind, stood waiting to accompany her down stairs. —But Fanny quickly rousing herself from the reverie into which she had fallen, said with sudden energy, "Pray, Alice, do not let me persuade you to do anything against your inclination; I

see it is unpleasant to you to leave your brother, so we must try to do without you. Good night." And she turned and left the room without one kind word.

They never before had parted thus, and Alice, though she was far from guessing the cause, and only imputed it to her having refused Fanny's request at first, still felt the estrangement deeply. But she wept no more that night; she communed with her own heart, and the result was a determination to leave, for a time, her present abode. A letter from Nina Solari, received a few days before, announced the signora's intention of coming in a few weeks to England, and earnestly entreated Alice to reside with her during her stay; and this invitation Alice now made up her mind to accept. "For why should I," she thought, "by my presence, cast a shadow over their happiness? I can have no feeling in common with them; gaiety is not for me, an orphan, nearly dependent on their bounty; and when I refuse to join in scenes from which I

shrink with abhorrence, they think me ungracious and ungrateful; and perhaps I do at times appear to be both, but they cannot read my heart—and Heaven grant they never may!”

Thus mused the lonely girl through the tedious hours of that weary night, for long after the sounds of mirth below had ceased to jar upon her ear, long after all those joyous ones were wrapt in peaceful slumber, Alice Norton remained awake; and it was not till the grey dawn was peeping through her closed curtains, that sweet sleep came to her relief.—But was it sweet to her?

Alas! no, for her heart was not at rest; her life was now one struggle to combat feelings that defied her feeble strength to conquer; and even in her feverish dreams, she ever saw before her a vision of more than mortal happiness, between which and herself hovered a dim spectre forbidding her approach; and when, in desperation, she advanced to meet and defy it, the pale, sad features of her mother were revealed; and Alice

would awake with a renewed feeling of discontent and despair. And yet her more than parental care of her brother increased day by day; unreservedly and entirely (it might be said) she devoted her life to him; and she did so the more because she fancied—she feared, at least—that her affection was weakening, from looking on him, as she could not avoid doing, as an insurmountable barrier to her happiness. How little she had imagined, when in all sincerity, she had so unhesitatingly given her promise to her dying parent—how little had Alice guessed the heart-burnings and struggles it would cost her to keep it! For with a sensitiveness peculiar to her generous and conscientious mind, she almost thought that it was virtually broken, when she discovered that she loved. And love she did, with all the passionate devotedness of a heart that had few objects on which to lavish its affections.

Stuart Aylmer was the very person to win, even without intending it, the passion of such a

girl; and having won, to retain it. Unlike Eva and many of her sex, Alice had never pictured to herself the beau ideal of a lover, had scarcely ever thought of one. Nursed in affliction, her mind had been elevated above the weakness of indulging in romantic fancies; she had never felt the *necessity* for loving, or the wish to be beloved, till she became acquainted with her cousin.

During their journey, in spite of Mrs. Nathan's practice of endeavouring to engross all attention to herself, Alice had had ample opportunities of judging of his worthiness and powers of pleasing. His kindness to Maurice, awakened her warmest gratitude; his gentleness and solicitude towards herself increased the prepossession, and when she saw him in the bosom of his family, cherished and adored; when she discovered the rich and varied powers of his mind, and more than that, when she found that though sought and flattered by all, his anxious kindness towards herself and her brother, increased rather than diminished; that he ever noted if she looked unhappy, and

would strive with tender earnestness to amuse and interest her—she could not choose but love.

Not for a moment did she fancy that it was returned by him, but still as she perceived not his apparent devotion to Eva—from joining so seldom in their parties—it would have been bliss to her to have indulged (in secret) her affection, and to have lived on the hope that it would be one day repaid.

But no such happiness did she dare permit herself; struggling ever to banish feelings which she looked upon as almost sin to have entertained. But hitherto her efforts had been without success, and she knew it, and had come to the resolution of quitting the field of danger.

The family were assembled at luncheon the following day, Fanny still retaining, though it was almost unknown to herself, her coldness towards her unoffending cousin—her devotion to Eva, and extreme solicitude for the consummation of her long cherished scheme, rendering her



ungenerous and even unjust towards another. No strangers being present, they were speaking of Clara's approaching marriage, which was to take place at an ancient church, some four miles distant. Fanny was busily counting on her fingers the number of guests to be invited, and arranging the order in which they were to go. After some little trouble, she discovered that four carriages would convey all the party, with the exception of one. And now delighting in these details, she was puzzling herself what should be done with this one, when Alice said—  
“My dear Fanny, pray leave me out of your calculations, for I shall not be here when Clara is married.”

“Not be here! What on earth do you mean, Alice?” and Fanny, already repenting her temporary coldness, spoke in her naturally affectionate way.

“I mean that I have had an invitation from my Italian friend, of whom you have heard me speak. She is coming to England, and, after

all her kindness to me, I cannot refuse to pass some time with her."

The attention of the rest of the party being now aroused, all eagerly pressed Alice to stay, at least, till after the wedding; but she replied mildly, but firmly, "I have written this morning to my friend, accepting her invitation and promising to join her immediately on her arrival in London, which I expect will be in about three weeks. You know," she continued, faintly smiling, "I can wish my cousin as much happiness at a distance as if I were here, and I am sure my presence will not be missed."

"Do not say so, *carissima*," said Stuart reproachfully; "however little you may value *our* society, I assure you yours is very dear to us. Is it not, Fan,?" turning to his favourite sister.

Simple as these words were, Alice's heart beat faster as they were spoken, and her countenance became paler than before.—She soon after left the room.

Absurd as her emotion may appear at Stuart's

remark, she was not the only one of the party that noticed it, and many eyes were on him when he ceased speaking. Among the rest were those of his mother, through whose mind flashed like lightning the thought, that perhaps, after all, he preferred his cousin to Eva; and the idea once admitted (as in Fanny's case) it rapidly gained ground. Indignant and enraged, she determined first, that Alice should not be prevented going, although she considered it only a *ruse* on her part the more effectually to conceal this attachment—for that it was mutual she entertained no doubt,—and secondly, that another day should not pass without an explanatory conversation with her son, respecting what she considered his folly and infatuation. This conversation and its results will be detailed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER X.

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"O, they love least that let men know their love."

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"COME in, my dear Stuart," said Mrs. Aylmer, as her son in obedience to her summons, stood at the door of her boudoir on the same afternoon. "I have so few opportunities of speaking with you when the young people are present, that I have ventured to send for you now, trusting that you will not object to spend a quiet half hour before dinner with me."

The reply of Stuart did full credit to his filial feelings, and expressed all the gratification and pleasure that the occasion called forth; but though he certainly knew less of his mother than the rest of her family had the advantage of doing, he was not simple enough to imagine

that it was merely for the sake of enjoying his society, that she had now sent for him, and he prepared himself accordingly for some communication of maternal importance. But Mrs. Aylmer, who prided herself especially on the tact with which she managed matters of this sort, had no intention of at once opening her mind on the subject at present nearest her heart, so she began by talking to her son of his uncle, questioning Stuart more particularly than she had hitherto done, as to his life in Italy, and many other minor matters to form an introduction to the one important theme. But the half hour soon passed away in this trifling converse, and perceiving her son had yawned more than once, the good lady thought it was better to lose no more time, and with an air of apparent carelessness she said—

“By the bye, it’s a pity we cannot persuade poor little Alice to stay till after the wedding; she has seemed so dull and listless lately, and it might amuse her.”

“ Oh, I don’t despair of persuading her to defer her visit,” said Stuart ; “ she has, as you observe, seemed very unwell lately. I fear she devotes herself too much to her brother, and as the child really is not benefited by it, I think she is decidedly wrong to injure her health by such close attendance.”

There was nothing necessarily lover-like in this reply, and Mrs. Aylmer’s countenance brightened as she continued : “ I perfectly agree with you, and as you seem to have more influence with her than any of the rest”—here she looked curiously at her son—“ do persuade her not only to remain till after Clara’s wedding, but to join more in your amusements ; it will divert her mind and improve her health too.”

Stuart, although he denied possessing more influence with their cousin than the rest, readily promised to exert whatever he had, in persuading her to stay ; and his calm self-possession while he spoke, nearly re-assured his mother on the subject of his preference for Alice. But now

the most difficult part of her task remained, namely, to express her wishes concerning Eva. She imagined that her son's heart being disengaged, there could be no doubt he would eventually fall into her views, even if he did not at present feel those passionate sentiments towards his father's ward, which some old-fashioned people deem necessary to happiness in the marriage state. But at the same time Mrs. Aylmer was well aware that young people little brook any interference in these matters, and that it required all her caution to open the subject. However, it must be done, and quickly too, for judging Eva by herself, (as all narrow-minded persons judge others,) Mrs. Aylmer feared that when introduced into society, the young heiress might be dazzled by the brilliant offers, her wealth and beauty could not fail to secure, and forget whatever interest she had felt for Stuart; but once affianced, all this danger would be averted, and the dutiful mother fully determined that no pains should be spared to effect this.

While these thoughts passed rapidly through her mind, Stuart, beginning to think that he had played the pious Æneas long enough, suddenly rose from his chair, saying, "You will excuse my leaving you now, my dear mother—it is nearly dinner time, by your pretty time-piece there, and I have to seek in the library for a book I promised to show Miss Herbert in the evening."

Mrs. Aylmer failed not to avail herself of this opening.

"Nay, sit down one moment, Stuart, you can find the book after dinner; and speaking of Miss Herbert, reminds me that she too has looked paler of late. I have been thinking whether it is possible she should be in love, but then, who has she seen?"

Stuart was attentively examining the curious workmanship of Cupid's wing on the time-piece before mentioned, so his mother could not notice his countenance; and as he made no reply to this observation, she was obliged to continue.

"It is really a charge of great responsibility."



"Of what charge do you speak?" asked Stuart.

"Why, the charge of a beautiful heiress like Miss Herbert, which your father very foolishly and hurriedly, I think, undertook."

"Oh!" was all the answer made.

"For my part, I think the sooner she is married the better, and I am sure you will agree with me?"

Now, as this was in the form of a question, Stuart had no choice but to reply, and so he said—"Indeed, my dear mother, if you wish for my opinion, I should say that there could be no hurry whatever for Miss Herbert to be married, and that it would be most desirable for her to see more of the world before she makes a choice, which must involve the happiness or misery of all her after-life."

Mrs. Aylmer was puzzled, and seeing no chance of discovering her son's sentiments in a round-about way, and as he plainly manifested symptoms of impatience, and a desire to be gone—

making a bold effort, though with her eyes turned away, she said laughingly—"What say you, my dear boy, to trying your own chance with the pretty heiress? I think I might venture a guess, that she would not frown upon you; and upon my word, she would make a very charming little wife." The ice was now broken, and meeting no opposition, Mrs. Aylmer went on—"It is singular now, that I never thought of this before; really I am quite struck with the idea. She is a delightful girl, and your father is so fond of her. And now I think of it, Stuart, you have certainly paid her great attention; everybody has remarked it. I would not wish, as you may well believe, my dear son"—here Mrs. Aylmer changed to a tone of maternal emotion—"to influence your choice in any way; your happiness, goodness knows, is my only consideration, but young people are so apt to be thoughtless, and fancy there is time for everything—and before we quit the subject, I would just suggest to you, that if Miss Herbert goes into society, even admitting

that she is fond of you now, the homage and admiration she will be certain to receive, may turn her head, and weaken her affections, and she will be lost to you for ever. Who would not be glad to marry a lovely and accomplished girl with eight thousand a year ! but once engaged to you, she will be indifferent to other offers, and you can return and claim her when you please."

Here there was a pause, and Stuart turned to his mother ; his brow was slightly contracted, and his cheek rather redder than usual, as he replied :—" As my mother you are entitled to give what advice you please, and as your son I have felt myself bound to listen to it ; now oblige me by speaking no more on this subject. You have quite mistaken my character. I will only add, that the circumstances you have named as motives for a premature proposal to Miss Herbert, whatever my sentiments towards her might be, are the very ones that would deter me from making it."

Mrs. Aylmer's cheek in its turn became flushed.

with anger, and she was about replying in no very affectionate tones, when Stuart guessing her intention, walked up to her and gently taking her hand, said, respectfully,—“Forgive me, my dearest mother, if I have said anything displeasing to you. I would not for the world give you offence, but my ideas differ so materially from yours, on the subject of which we have spoken, that I could not avoid expressing them, especially as I was called upon to make a reply. Let this conversation be forgotten, and as my stay in England will now be short, I sincerely trust no misunderstanding may arise between us, to make it unpleasant.” And raising the hand he still held, to his lips, he turned and left the room, before his greatly vexed and disappointed listener had time to frame a reply.

The result of this conversation was a decided change in Stuart's manners to Eva; all those little nameless attentions that she had learned to look for, and value so highly from him, were now withdrawn. He generally spent his mornings

with his father in the library, and occasionally he shot or hunted with Sir Marmaduke Digby. In their social evenings, instead of turning over the leaves of Eva's music book, he now sat near his cousin, (whom he *had* persuaded to leave her solitude,) and read aloud to her favourite passages from Italian authors; and Alice began to smile again under the cheering influence of this; and even her efforts to conquer her unhappy attachment weakened by degrees, till at length, without an end or object in view, not even believing herself beloved, she yielded for the time to the fascination of abandonment; and imagining her feelings shrouded from all eyes, enjoyed a species of intoxicating happiness, that till now she had believed it impossible ever to experience. But though she guessed it not, there were eyes that watched her every movement. Mrs. Aylmer being totally unable to understand her son's feelings, imagined at once, after their conversation, that some prior attachment existed, which had prevented him falling into her plans respecting

Eva, and once more her suspicions fixed on Alice, for whom she conceived a most violent dislike, which was strengthened when she saw those attentions which she imagined were due only to the heiress, bestowed on the almost penniless cousin.

And there were others too that remarked with equal dissatisfaction the change in Stuart's manner. Fanny was highly indignant, and again wondered what it all meant ; her coldness to her cousin increased, though Alice was far too much absorbed to remark it. And Eva could not avoid seeing what all saw. It cannot be said that she wept not in secret, that the night hours were not passed in vain surmisings as to the cause of this seeming desertion ; but it may be with truth affirmed that her outward manner was the same as ever ; the delicate glow departed not from her cheek, nor the joyous music from her merry voice ; Eva Herbert continued still as she had always been, a creature of light and loveliness—so bright and sparkling with beauty

and happiness did she seem, that even the miserable, the wretched, those from whom Heaven's hand had dashed the cup of bliss, when they saw her in the radiance of her youth and beauty, roused themselves for a moment from their own deep sorrows, to breathe a prayer that one so lovely and so brilliant might be spared the bitter woes that they had known.

But how long she would have maintained the appearance of a happiness which she was far from feeling, it is impossible to say, for an event at this time occurred, which turned her thoughts into another and a very different channel.

## CHAPTER XI.

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"She, the loved one, the departed,  
Came to visit me once more."

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THIS event was the news of Mr. Herbert's sudden and dangerous illness. A letter from his housekeeper informed Eva of it, and intreated the latter to come to him immediately; as he had constantly expressed the most anxious wish to see his darling niece once more. So the letter said; and Eva lost no time in making preparation for her journey. Mr. Aylmer insisted on accompanying his ward, and Fanny, who was almost heart-broken at witnessing the deep and passionate grief of her friend, was also allowed to be of the party—and with old Janet attending them, they started the morning after the letter had been received.



Eva was too much absorbed in this new affliction, to think much of those she left behind at Elm Court ; indeed there was but one to whom, under any circumstances, it would have cost her the slightest pain to say farewell ; and even to this one, it had now been said without any visible emotion, although she knew it might be years before they met again. Some time after, in recalling this parting, she could not but remember that *he* had looked somewhat paler than usual, when she held out her hand to him, after having performed the same ceremony to the rest—and that he had expressed his wishes for her happiness with much apparent fervour. Eva remembered all this, it was not likely she could forget the smallest circumstance connected with hopes that had become so dear to her ; but she remembered also, and even more vividly, that on returning to the breakfast room for something she had left there—after having taken leave of the family—Stuart was standing in a window recess, speaking low and earnestly to Alice Norton ;

she noted too, the expression of the latter's countenance, and the light of happiness that shone from those dove-like eyes, as she listened to the whispered words; and that even then, forgetting all else for the moment, she had felt a choking sensation as she looked on them, and for one brief instant, an emotion of indignation towards Stuart. He had turned quickly round on hearing her footstep, tears were in her eyes, and she did not raise her face, but allowing her veil to fall, and waving her hand to Mrs. Aylmer, again hurried from the room, and once more, as she took her place in the carriage by the side of her fond and sympathising friend—once more poor Eva inwardly murmured, "I would I were that pale-faced cousin!"

And then with a feeling of self-reproach, she endeavoured to dismiss all thoughts but those connected with her suffering uncle; and soon succeeded, for she loved the old man well, and the idea that he might die was very grievous to her. Neither Mr. Aylmer, nor Fanny sought

to soothe a sorrow so natural by vain words, and Eva appreciated their silence as the truest sympathy ; but it was a melancholy time to all, and they hailed with sincere satisfaction, the first glimpse of the grey hills of Westmoreland.

The journey had been a rapid one, and on the evening of the second day, the travelling carriage entered the little village of Glandale, and passing quickly by its thatched cottages and their wondering occupants, drove up to the parsonage.

An aged woman, the same who had written to Eva, hastened to the gate, and before the niece had time to inquire about her uncle, said in a tremulous voice, " God bless you ! Miss Eva, I am so thankful you are come ; poor master is no worse in his body ; we think he suffers less pain than he did, but his head does not seem quite right, Miss." Then curtsying to the strangers, she begged them all to walk in. Mr. Aylmer, however, declined doing so, saying he should go and see if he could procure quarters for himself in the village, but that Fanny might, if there

was room, remain with her friend. This, then, was decided on, as the housekeeper assured them there was ample accommodation, and the kind old gentleman left his companions and drove back to the village.

Eva wished to see her uncle at once, but being told he was just sleeping a bit, she said she would remain with Fanny for a few minutes in the garden ; and sending Janet to unpack the few things they had brought with them, the two girls found themselves alone.

“And this, Eva,” began Fanny, “is the sweet home you have so frequently described to me ! I do not wonder, now, that you should often have wished to see it again. What a glorious place it is ! with those blue hills behind, and that forest of trees to the left, and the bright water sparkling there below, which, I suppose, is one of your celebrated lakes—and then that peep of the church, to the right. Oh, this is positively my beau ideal of peaceful loveliness ! I really think, Eva, I will ask your uncle when he gets

better, to let me stay with him and be his nurse ; for, here, I should like to live and die."

Thus Fanny spoke half to herself and half to her companion, but Eva heeded her not, she was wandering round the little garden, examining and welcoming every well-known flower and shrub that she had used to tend so carefully. Suddenly she stopped, and bursting into tears, exclaimed—

"Fanny, my uncle will never recover ! see here, the white rose-bush is dead ! This was his favourite tree, the one his wife loved so well, and he watched its growth and flourishing as if it had been a dear child. It was his first thought in the morning and his last last at night, and I have often told him that I was jealous of that tree ; and look, now ! it is quite withered and leafless—surely this is an omen of his own death !"

"Nonsense ! Eva, what superstition is this ? You could not expect to find a rose-tree in full bloom in September."

"Hush ! Fanny, you know not what you

“speak of—don’t you see how different the others look ! This one has long been dead ! There is no hope then ! but as you love or pity me, dear, do not begin arguing about superstition. I could not bear it, at present.—Ah, here comes Janet, perhaps my uncle is awake.”

It was as she anticipated, and hastily drying her tears, and bidding Fanny amuse herself as well as she could, Eva crept with a noiseless step, but a beating heart, to the room of the invalid.

“ Does he know I am here ? ” she enquired of the servant who stood at the door.

“ We have told him, Miss,” was the answer, “ but he took no notice, may be he won’t even know you again. And don’t be startled, my dear Miss Eva, at seeing him ; the poor master is sadly changed.”

But in spite of this caution, Eva was startled and could scarcely suppress a shriek, as she looked on the altered features of her beloved relative. The old man had risen from his bed, and

was sitting in an easy chair, supported with pillows, the snowy covering of which was not more colourless than his pallid and sunken cheek. The eyes that had ever beamed such looks of love and tenderness on her, were now fixed, and painfully clear, and the whole countenance seemed drawn to a ghastly and unnatural length.

Eva, after the first shock had a little subsided, approached, and gently taking his emaciated hand in hers, and looking fondly in his face, said softly, "Dear, dear uncle, do you not know me! it is I, your own Eva."—But no answer came.

"How long has he been in this state?" Eva now demanded of the old woman, who stood behind his chair.

"About four days, Miss; before that, he suffered great pain, but was quite sensible like. Then all at once, the doctor says, the disease went to his head; and he has been since as you

see him now. Sometimes he talks to himself, and it is very mournful to hear him."

And it was very mournful and heart-rending to Eva to see him thus, and sinking on her knees by his side, she bathed his passive hand with tears of agony.

"My poor, poor uncle! would that I had never left you! Oh, it was cruel, selfish, ungrateful to do it; you have had no one to soothe or comfort you in your loneliness—and this is the end of all my schemes for our reunion! Speak to me, dearest, dearest uncle! just one word! one little, little word! to say you forgive me."—And the wretched girl sobbed aloud.

Suddenly a partial gleam of intelligence lighted up the old man's eyes, and half starting from his chair, he looked eagerly in the weeping Eva's face for a few seconds, and then, bending forward, murmured, "Annie!"

No word was spoken, and he continued, while the flush of unusual excitement deepened on his hollow cheek:—



" You are come back at last then, my wife, my cherished one ! Oh ! I have missed you long, Annie ! the days were dark and dreary, for the sun never shone after you were gone ; the sun never shone, and so—come closer, Annie dearest—and so your rose-tree withered ; it withered, Annie, and then I knew my end was near. And I was coming to join you, love ; but you have come to me ! And you are fairer, brighter than before, though your cheek is very pale—but you have been an angel, Annie, and angels, they say, are fair and lovely ;" and the old man twined his arm round Eva's neck, and looked at her with passionate tenderness.

She could not speak, and again he continued :

" I feared you would be angry, Annie, and look coldly on me when you heard your rose-tree was dead ; but I meant to tell you how I had loved and cherished it, and made it my companion and friend ; for I was alone, Annie—alone ! Indeed I tended it well, but the sun never shone, it was all dark ! dark ! and so it died."

And here, overcome by the excitement of speaking, the old man relaxed his hold of his niece, and leaning back in the chair, wept softly like a little child !

“ You see he does not remember you, Miss ; he is thinking of poor Missus that is long dead and gone, but perhaps if you speak a bit more to him his memory may come back.”

But Eva's heart was full to bursting, and she could not speak. Rising gently from her knees, she crept from the room, and having found her ever-sympathising friend, she threw her arms round Fanny's neck and sobbed without restraint. In answer to the latter's enquiries, Eva detailed the painful scene that had just taken place, adding, “ It is *I* that have killed him ! Fanny, I know it is—my leaving him was a second bereavement, and his heart is broken. The loneliness of which he spoke so pitifully was after *I* had gone, but he thinks not of me now ; if he would but recognise me, I am sure I might console him—but he never will know me again !”

“Dear, dear Eva, compose yourself. Perhaps your uncle derives more happiness from believing that his wife, to whom he seems to have been so devoted, has returned to him, than if he knew it to be you. Do not, therefore, wish this small consolation denied him.”

The weeping girl made no reply, and Fanny continued,—“As you seem indisposed to talk, and I dare say would rather be alone, dear Eva, I shall ask Janet to show me the way to your Murmuring Glen. I have a great fancy for seeing it, and the evening is so lovely.”

Eva, admitting that she was unfit for conversation, advised her friend by all means to take a walk—and in a few minutes the mourner was left alone, alone with her own sad thoughts. And she sat by the gothic window, now nearly overgrown with untrained ivy, of the little room that had for years been her own, and which looked out into the garden below. The dark green trees were stirred gently by the autumn

wind ; already some yellow leaves lay on the smooth grass-plot beneath ; and the young girl looked with swimming eyes on all the familiar objects around her. It was sad to reflect that he who had lived for years so blessed in this sweet and tranquil home, was passing away like the blossoms of his own cherished flowers ; and that in a few months his very name would be unheard among those with whom his lot had so long been cast. And still those flowers must bloom again, and the trees his hand had planted grow more luxuriant every year ; and still each returning spring must clothe them all in beauty, and the glad sun shine with not a ray the less, though the eyes of one who had worshipped all it shone upon, were closed for ever ; and one heart that had expanded with rapture at the glorious works of its Maker, was for ever stilled.

Ay, so it is ! Man dies—his seat at the hearth is vacant, and still the lark sings on ; man dies,

his body rots, and still the bee sucks honey from the flower, and lays by its winter store ; and morning and night, spring time and harvest change not, though an immortal soul has passed into eternity.

There is nothing new in this ; it is an observation all must make, when they reflect for the first time on that mysterious change called death ; but it *was* new to the young girl whose life had hitherto been a scene of almost unbroken sunshine—and faster and faster fell her burning tears, even after the old nurse had been in to say that Mr. Herbert had sunk into a calm sleep again. Still Eva sat with her throbbing head pressed between her clasped hands, and unconscious of all but her own mournful thoughts. She was roused at length by a vivid flash of lightning, which was succeeded by a terrible peal of thunder—and starting hastily up, she perceived that a storm had come on. Down the rain was falling, pattering heavily against the window,

through the trickling leaves ; flash, flash went the lightning, the thunder becoming so loud and appalling, that it seemed as if it had settled over the house.

## CHAPTER XII.

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“ Oh, never another dream can be,  
Like that early dream of ours,  
When the fairy hope lay down like a child,  
And slept amid opening flowers.  
Little we reck'd of our coming years;  
We fancied them just what we chose,  
For whatever life's after lights may be,  
It colours its first from the rose.”

“ LA ! Miss, you can't surely be thinking of going out in this pouring rain !” said the house-keeper, who met Eva coming out of her own room, with her bonnet on.

“ I am going to meet Miss Aylmer—I do not mind the rain,” replied Eva. “ Where is Janet ?”

“ She returned about an hour ago, before the

rain began, but she has started again with an umbrella, to meet the young lady, who, she says, wished to walk alone in the glen. I hope, Miss, she won't come to no harm in that lonesome place."

At this moment, the object of their anxieties appeared, coming up the garden escorted by Janet, who was holding an immense umbrella over Fanny's head. The latter, though apparently wet through and in very miserable plight indeed, had an expression of far greater animation on her countenance than when she started; and going up to Eva, she exclaimed, "Tell me now, first of all, how your uncle is, dear Eva, and then I have something to relate to you."

"My uncle is sleeping, Fanny, at present," was the answer; "but I can only think of him." Then seeing an expression of disappointment on her friend's face, and remembering that Fanny had come all this long journey out of friendship for herself, and that the dying man was a stranger to her, Eva continued, "But, neverthe-



less, Fanny, I will listen to whatever you have to say, after you have changed your clothes. To sit down in your present state, would cause your death."

"Oh, I had forgotten that I was wet—well, come with me to the pretty little room they have given me, and I can begin while I am making myself presentable again, for I am dying to tell you."

"Have you met anybody?" said Eva, now perceiving an earnestness and excitement in Fanny's manner, that she could not account for.

"I have met my destiny, Eva! but now listen.—I will not dwell upon my walk to the glen, although, even about that, I could say a thousand pretty things; another time I will tell you how enchanted I was with all I saw, and how my longings increased to have a home—a fairy home it would indeed be—in this sweet spot; but passing over all this now, suppose me to have arrived at my destination and Janet dismissed, that there might be no witness to the

childish extasies I knew I should feel and exhibit, in examining and exploring the solitudes of the glen. I ran up the banks for wild flowers, leapt over the little streams, and in fact performed a thousand other mad pranks, that none but a lover of nature and the country, and whose previous life had been almost wholly passed in towns, would ever have been inspired to play. In the midst of these antics, a dark cloud approached, and presently the storm burst in all its fury. Seeing that the woods deepened further up the glen, I hurried thither, in hopes that some friendly tree would afford me a sort of shelter from the now pouring rain. On reaching the thickest part of the wood, I perceived in the distance something that looked like the ghost of a ruin, and which promised a more effectual shelter; to that I bent my steps, in a rather less joyous mood than I was before the storm commenced. I found it was a kind of hermitage, though nearly gone to decay; however, I rushed in, almost out of breath, feeling very thankful that I had discovered such

a refuge. Judge of my astonishment, when I heard behind me a slight cough—I believe I screamed ; at any rate I was horribly frightened for the moment ; and turning round, I saw a young man (with a book and an umbrella in his hand) who had just risen from the rude stone bench at the far corner of the ruin—the darkness had prevented my seeing him on my entrance. He advanced, and apologised for having alarmed me, said something about the rain having driven him there for shelter, and then was about to go away ; I, all the time too confused to speak, although I longed to tell him not to expose himself to the storm, for he looked so pale and handsome—delicate, I mean—however, before I had time to collect my thoughts, he turned back and begged to know if he could be of any assistance in letting my friends know my situation, and sending them with umbrellas and cloaks. His voice was so low and soft, Eva—and I thanked him as well as I could for his politeness, said I was staying with Miss Herbert at the

parsonage, and that if he would call and let you know where to find me, it would be doing me a great favour. Just then I saw Janet coming at a quick pace towards the ruin, and the stranger perceiving her also, bowed, and went away through the wood. Now tell me, dearest Eva, if you remember such a person as I have described, and who he is?"

Eva, though she had striven (for the sake of pleasing poor Fanny) to listen attentively to what she had told her, had really heard but a very small portion of it—her thoughts being still in the chamber of her dying uncle; but not to appear ungracious, she replied, "Indeed, love, I cannot tell you anything about him—he is probably a stranger in the neighbourhood."

"Oh, no! for when I mentioned the parsonage, he told me he knew it well, and I even fancied that his pale cheek reddened as he said so. Now do think again. But you do not speak, Eva—does my talking tease you?"

"Fanny dear, you see the state I am in, my

thoughts are all in confusion ; but I can forgive your teasing, for I see that you are in love."

"In love ! Oh no, my feelings are too calm and tranquil for that ; yet were it not for your affliction, my own dear Eva, I think I should be perfectly happy now—happier than I ever was before in my life."

"Ah, Fanny, we all know love's first steps are upon the rose ; but these very roses have thorns, which sooner or later will make themselves felt, and then——"

"Oh, spare me love lectures, Eva ! and let me at least enjoy the soft touch of roses to my feet as long as possible. But, no, no, I am not in love, I have been talking nonsense and worrying you, my own kind friend. I know not why I have done so, but that I feel strangely excited and foolish to-night. You are not angry with me, Eva?"

"Surely not, Fanny—you do indeed look flushed and excited ; I fear you have taken cold.

Let me persuade you to go to bed at once, and have something warm."

"I will," said Fanny, "for my head is beginning to swim, and I am very cold." Then as Eva was opening the door to go out, she followed her to say—"And if you should be able to guess who the stranger is, you will come back—there's a darling, and tell me."

Eva readily promised this, for she feared that Fanny was really ill; and returning in about a quarter of an hour, with a posset, prepared by Janet, declared by the old woman to be infallible in cases of colds, she satisfied Fanny's curiosity by explaining that the stranger of the "Murmuring Glen," was Edward Dacres, the young curate of a neighbouring village. "I have just heard from the servants," she added, "that he is now at Glandale, so it must be he. His mother and sister live in this village, and he is very frequently here. I know them all alightly, as Edward used occasionally to assist my uncle."

Fanny would have asked more questions, but

Eva refused to listen to her. "You must try to sleep, dear Fan," she said; "I shall most likely look in upon you again, as I do not intend going to bed myself, till I have seen my uncle once more. Good night, for I have no heart to talk longer."

The nurse very unwillingly assented to Eva's desire of sharing the labour of watching Mr. Herbert during the night; but the young girl was determined in this to have her own way, and the grey light of morning was already dawning, when, leaving her uncle still in a tranquil sleep, she retired herself to rest.

The sun was shining brightly through her closed curtains when Eva awoke; and ringing her bell, she inquired of the woman who answered it, how her uncle was? "He seems pretty easy, Miss," was the reply; "it is not long that he has been awake—and he knows us all now."

"Oh, then he will know me!" said Eva, her eyes filled with joyful tears. "I will go to him

directly ; but where is Miss Aylmer—gone out for another walk !”

“ No Miss, she is not up yet. Janet went to call her some hours ago, but she was asleep, and looked feverish like ; so we thought it best not to disturb her. May be she’s tired from the journey.”

Eva hastened to her friend’s room, and found her as the woman had described, asleep indeed, but with one arm thrown over her head as if from restlessness ; her cheeks flushed to the brightest crimson, and her lips parched and slightly open.”

Eva called the nurse, and as they stood looking at the sleeper, Fanny opened her eyes. “ Ah, Eva, is it you ?” she said, “ I am sure I must have slept a long time this morning, but do give me some water, I am fainting from thirst.”

“ You are very ill, love, I fear,” replied her friend. “ Why, your hand is burning !”

“ Yes, I fear I have indeed taken cold, for I felt very ill all night, and could not sleep till



this morning. But do not say anything about it to poor papa, he would be so alarmed."

"Nay, Fanny, I must tell him, or how account for your not coming down; for, of course, you cannot think of leaving your bed to-day."

"Nonsense! Eva, I shall get up immediately."

"Let the young lady have her own way, Miss," said the nurse, "she will soon come to your way of thinking." And she was right, for Fanny, having attempted to rise, sank back on the bed again, declaring herself too giddy to stand.

Eva, her mind already oppressed by the weight of her other griefs, became greatly alarmed at what she saw; but, concealing her fears from the object of them, she spoke cheerfully, and told her to be quite quiet, and that she would send her tea and other drinks to quench her thirst, and books to amuse her, while she herself was with her uncle.

"But pray, dearest Eva, do not frighten papa," said Fanny, again.

"No, no, darling Fan, have no apprehension about that, I shall merely say you have a slight cold, which is the fact—so *au revoir*, my Fanny."

When the door was closed, Eva anxiously enquired of the nurse, what she thought of Fanny's state.

"That she is much worse than she knows herself, Miss ; and not only her papa, but a physician should be sent for immediately. We don't expect the master's doctor here till the evening, and Miss Aylmer mustn't wait till then."

"Oh ! what can I do ?" exclaimed Eva distractedly. "Where shall we find a medical man ? and who can go for one ?—and I must be with my dear uncle. Send for Mr. Aylmer first."

"My dear young lady," replied the nurse, "pray be calm, or we shall be having you ill too. Janet shall go directly to the village, and find Mr. Aylmer, and he will give all the necessary instructions. You had better go to your uncle now, for he is expecting you."

Eva followed her advice, and in another moment was folded in the old man's arms.

"Heaven bless you! my darling child," said he, "you have come to nurse your poor dying ncle! I knew I should not live long after you left me—but do not, my own darling, reproach yourself for this. You did but obey your father's wishes.—You have grown even more lovely than ever," continued he, passing his hand fondly over her dark silken hair, and gazing on her earnest countenance—"and you will stay with me, I know, till all is over?"

"Dear, dear uncle! I will never leave you again—but do not speak of dying. Live! live!" cried she, passionately throwing herself on her knees beside him, kissing his hands, and weeping violently; "live, my own dear uncle, for my sake, and I will make you happy yet! Who should I have in the world, if you were to die? Even when I was absent from you, I knew that I had an uncle who loved me, I had a home of my own, a natural protector, and I never

had a moment of sorrow, but I wished to fly to Glandale, and be happy again. But I shall never be happy more!" continued the beautiful girl, with fresh tears falling from her eyes.

"Eva, would you recal the fainting traveller when the haven of rest is in sight, or snatch the cup from him who is panting for its contents! and oh, my dear child, dearly, fondly as I love you, there is one waiting for me dearer still. You cannot understand the love of those who have dwelt for long years together; who have felt the same feelings, hoped the same hopes; sorrowed and rejoiced—and more than that, prayed together. I have had happy visions since my illness, fancying sometimes my Annie was come back, and that I conversed with her as of old. Eva, I have implored our Heavenly Father that your lot may be as blessed as mine was, before I lost my wife, my all. I could ask none brighter for my beloved child."

"Dearest uncle, how can I be happy when you are gone!" said the pale and weeping girl.

"Fear not, sweet child; you are good and gentle, and beautiful and rich, and such never want friends. Every one must love you, and God's blessing is ever upon such as you."

Their conversation was here interrupted by the housekeeper, announcing that Mr. Aylmer was below, and desired earnestly to see Miss Herbert; and again resigning her uncle to the care of the nurse, Eva hastened to see the anxious father.

Fanny had always been his best-loved daughter, and he had never known her to have a day's illness since she left India; when, therefore, Janet, who met him on his way to the parsonage, informed him of his daughter's illness, he was, as Fanny had feared, alarmed and agitated, and hastened on to learn the extent of the calamity from her friend.

"My dear Miss Herbert, what is all this I .

hear about Fanny—what can have occasioned this sudden illness?”

Eva then told him of his daughter's ramble on the preceding evening, her taking refuge in the ruin, and walking home in the rain. She did not mention her meeting with the stranger, as that, of course, had nothing to do with her present illness, but she told him the nurse's opinion that a physician should be sent for, and begged him instantly to get post-horses and drive to the nearest town—which was about seven miles from Glandale. Her uncle's medical attendant also resided there, but she told him that he would not arrive until the evening.

- Mr. Aylmer lost no time in following this suggestion, and in about two hours he returned with the physician whom Eva had named, whose opinion, on seeing Fanny, was that her illness was serious, and that without the greatest care it might be dangerous. The fever had increased since the morning, to which was added acute inflammation of the throat; and the patient, he said, would
-

probably before night be delirious. Having ordered the usual remedies, he departed, promising to see her the next morning.

Mr. Aylmer, as may be imagined, was in a state of great alarm, and proposed sending immediately for his wife, but this, Eva earnestly persuaded him not to do; representing how perfectly useless she would be, (an invalid herself and nervous to an extreme degree) in a sick room. "Wait at least till our dear Fanny's illness is declared dangerous," she said, "at present she only requires care and quiet, and those she will be much more likely to have without Mrs. Aylmer, whose fears would magnify the danger, and alarm her daughter."

"I believe you are right," said the father, "but she must have some one, besides the nurse, to attend on her, for you cannot leave your uncle, and even if you did so occasionally, I am sure you are not strong enough to undertake the care of two invalids. Suppose we send for Clara or Alice?"

"Believe me, it would be worse than useless," said Eva, with something of the peevishness of grief. "I would not mention Fanny's illness till she is better—but I know what I can do; I will instantly write to Miss Stanley, my old governess—she is, I have heard, staying with some old friends of hers in this county, and I am certain she will not lose a moment in coming to us. I have so often written to her about Fanny that she may be said to know her already, and my poor uncle will be very glad to see her. She was quite one of the family. Besides, she will not mind sharing my room, so we shall be all together, for of course poor Fanny could not be moved—and we will take it in turns to nurse."

"Well, well, I see I must leave all to you," said her guardian, hastily wringing her hand." It is a most unfortunate thing—happening in a stranger's house too; but of course you will not unnecessarily disturb or alarm Mr. Herbert. With regard to attendants, I need not say that if



money can purchase their care of my darling Fanny, it shall not be spared."

"I understand, I understand; I will see to all that myself, and I trust in a few days we shall hear her merry laugh again.

"God bless you, Miss Herbert," said the father, hastily clasping Eva's hand, and hurrying from the room.

During the rest of the day, Eva divided her attention equally between the two sufferers. Her uncle seemed to grow worse towards evening, though he still knew all around him, and tried to thank them for their attentions. The doctor confirmed poor Eva's belief that his sufferings would soon be ended. He was indeed sinking fast; but there was a look not only of resignation, but of perfect joy on his countenance (when not disturbed by pain) that almost forbade those that loved him to weep for his departure.

Every hour some one or other of his parishioners came to inquire how he was, and many implored to see him; but when Eva mentioned

"Fanny is a woman no worse than useless," said the wife, "and the consequence of the perviousness of the disease is that I shall not be able to attend to Fanny's illness as I wish. But I know what I can do; I will send her to Miss Stacey, my old nurse—she is I have heard staying with Mr. and Mrs. Stacey in the country, and I am sure she will be a great help in coming to me. I will write to her about it, and she may be sure to know her al-ways. And my poor uncle will be very glad to see her. She was once one of the family. Besides, she will not mind sharing my room, so we shall be all together. In of course poor Fanny would not be moved—and we will take it in turns to nurse."

"Well, well, I see I must leave all to you," said her guardian, hastily wringing her hand. "It is a most unfortunate thing—happening in a stranger's house too; but of course you will not unnecessarily disturb or alarm Mr. Stacey with regard to attending to her."

money can purchase their care of my darling Fanny, it shall not be spared."

"I understand, I understand; I will see to all that myself, and I trust in a few days we shall hear her merry laugh again.

"God bless you, Miss Herbert," said the father, hastily clasping Eva's hand, and hurrying from the room.

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Every hour he spoke of the dear friends he was to see in the next world.

this, he shook his head feebly, and said, "It would be too much for me, darling, to witness their sorrow, who I know love me so truly. But there is one person I must see, and for that interview I would husband the little strength I have left. Come nearer Eva, my voice is very weak, and it pains me greatly to speak."

"Do not speak, then, my own dear uncle, till you have slept again."

"My next sleep, dear child, will have no wakening in this world, so listen to me now. I know who my successor is to be, indeed it is through my own exertions that he is to be appointed; and there is none whom I could have preferred, for he is every-way excellent. You are acquainted with him, darling, it is Edward Dacres, who has so often assisted me. He is much beloved by the people, partly because of his own good qualities, and partly I believe because he is one of the descendants of the Dacres of the North, who formerly possessed a great portion of this county, and were for many

centuries a worthy and popular race. But from whatever cause, Edward, young as he is, is much esteemed, and I thank God that so good a man is to succeed me. I once hoped that you—but it is idle talking of this; I do think that he loved you, Eva, but it is not of that I would speak at present. What I mean is, that I wish earnestly to see this young man who is henceforth to become the shepherd of my flock. They have ever been as dear children to me. I have also made him the executor of my little property, which I have left to my poor parishioners. You will send for him, love, this evening?”

Eva promised to do this immediately, and then at her uncle's desire, left him alone.

She found Mr. Aylmer waiting for her in the parlour, and after assuring him that his daughter was no worse, she communicated her conversation with her uncle, adding her fear that he would not live through another day; and as it would be quite impossible for Fanny to

be moved, at any rate for a week or two, she suggested that her guardian had better himself see Mr. Dacres, the future rector and executor of her uncle, for the purpose of making some arrangement about them occupying the house, till the invalid could leave it with safety.

Poor Eva! she had enough to do, to think of all these things, and her own heart bleeding the while, at her beloved uncle's state; but it was probably well for her that this exertion was indispensable, or she might have sunk under the contemplation of a bereavement so terrible and unexpected.

Mr. Aylmer fully appreciated the self-control and strength of mind she displayed, for like most of his own sex, he was himself totally unqualified to think or judge in cases of emergency resembling the present; and he therefore gladly and thankfully resigned himself to the guidance of his young and inexperienced ward. It was now arranged that he should find the future rector, and after communicating Mr. Herbert's

wish to see him, explain the circumstances in which they were unfortunately placed, and which Eva declared would be quite sufficient, as she knew he would be the first to urge their stay as long as it was necessary or agreeable—and she left her guardian and hastened to Fanny's bedside.

CHAPTER XIII.

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"There is a nameless change come o'er that face,  
A fading off of beauty and of grace,  
A harshness which those mournful eyes belie,  
The peevishness of utter misery!"

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THE departure of Mr. Aylmer and his companions from Elm Court, completed the discontent that had been fast growing on all the party. Mrs. Aylmer and Clara fretted because the marriage of the latter must now be delayed; Stuart was melancholy, from what cause no one knew; and the pale-faced cousin was the only one of the party who continued the same as before—if Mrs. Nathan may be excepted, who was far too comfortably housed to allow such a small matter as a diminution of their numbers to affect her tranquillity. Alice and Stuart were



now constantly together ; their mornings were spent in walking or riding, sometimes accompanied by Maurice, but oftener alone ; and much of their evenings in quiet *tête-a-têtes* that ceased not till supper came. They spoke of Italy, its poetry, its music, its glory, and its skies ; and the soft eyes of the devoted girl would beam with bright, fond delight, as the varied powers of her companion's mind unfolded themselves in these conversations. Alice was literally living in a world of dreams, and all severity of thought, all prudence of reflection was banished for the time. But this state of things could not last ; again her brother's health declined, and she accused her own recent neglect as the cause, and once more resolutely devoted herself to the task she had so solemnly promised to fulfil.

And now, in her moments of solitude, she could not refuse to look into her own heart, and tremble at the weakness and irresolution displayed there. She had long known that she loved with the intensity of a forbidden thought,

and with a hidden fervour that nothing but death could quench. And she had long persuaded herself that this love was unreturned, and this conviction led her to seek the dangerous society she knew she should have shunned, because as she often mentally repeated (as an excuse for such waywardness of heart,) it was only herself who could suffer by it—he did not love, and would never know how he had been worshipped; why then should she deny herself the present happiness of seeing, hearing, conversing with the object of her every thought, the guiding star of her solitary existence?

The natural reserve of Alice's character, which forbade even the thought of a confidant, together with the perfect hopelessness of her passion—that is to say as perfect as such hopelessness can be—all tended to strengthen her attachment, until reason itself nearly gave way under the struggles she endured. Her health also was declining, and seemed to promise her a speedy release from a life which offered so few allurements,

for though the rich flush often mantled over the soft cheek, and the fine eyes shone with wild brilliance, there were other and more frequent times, when that cheek rivalled the marble's whiteness, and the long lashes of those speaking eyes drooped with the languor of a soul unsatisfied. The body's decay had commenced, and nothing but a mind at rest could stay its threatened progress. But a mind at rest was not for one who had yielded to the influence of a passion, that had become too powerful for her strength to subdue. And now to render it more difficult, a new and startling idea presented itself to her, as she recalled the events of the last few weeks, while watching by the side of the suffering but patient blind boy. Was it not possible—oh! dazzling thought!—nay even probable, (hope suddenly mounting like a rocket shotten) that he—there was but one *he* to her—returned her love? and a hundred nameless acts and words, unheeded at the times, rushed to her recollection, and made her heart beat tumultuously with

strange, wild visions of a blessedness almost too great for contemplation ; but at the next instant its throbbings were nearly stilled by the chill remembrance of her actual condition, and the miserable idea that if those hopes should be confirmed, they would but increase the desolation of her heart—for his wretchedness then would be added to her own. And thinking thus, she looked upon her sleeping brother, and dark thoughts crowded on her tortured mind.

“ If he died !” again she repeated, “ if he died, I might be happy,” and an unnatural feeling of hatred was growing in her heart; but its softness had not all departed—another look at that meek, sad face, another thought on the blind boy’s dreary lot, and the affection of years still triumphed. Then sinking on her knees, her lips blanched with terror at her own fearful imaginings, Alice prayed !

Her spirit was tranquillised when she arose, and many wise resolutions she made, as she had often done before. She would never see her cousin

again, but devote herself wholly and entirely to her brother, and even if he should die, (in spite of all her care) to atone for her almost involuntary sin, she would doom herself to a single life, and rejecting the sweet sympathies of her kind, live solitary and unloved.

A few short hours put this resolve to the test. A servant entered to say that Mr. Stuart begged she would leave her attendance on her brother for half an hour, and take a walk with him. Her first thought was to refuse, but her fluttering heart whispered, it were as well to go ! “ This once, only this once, and I will convince myself whether he loves me or not, and then all shall be ended.”—Alice went.

She found her cousin waiting for her on the lawn, and as soon as he saw her he advanced, and passing her arm through his own, said kindly, “ A thousand thanks, dear Alice, for this ready compliance with my request. I thought you would not refuse me, for it may be our last walk together.”

“ Our last walk, Stuart, how ? tell me ! ”

“ I have been summoned away most suddenly. My uncle is worse, and they fear he will scarcely live even to see me. I start early to-morrow.”

His companion did not speak.

“ What, not one word, Alice? not one expression of regret at my departure?—we may never meet again.”

They had now reached a rustic temple in one of the shrubberies. It was completely shaded by a grove of beautiful acacias, and had always been a favourite resting-place of the juvenile party in their rambles through the grounds; and here the cousins paused and sat down, while Alice now answered, though her words were so low as scarcely to be distinguished, “ You cannot doubt my sorrow, Stuart. Have you not always been my best and kindest friend? I am sure Maurice will pine more than ever when you are gone.”

For some time neither spoke again. At length Stuart resumed: “ I had wished to speak to you on a subject that is very dear to

me—one in which all my happiness is embarked : but you must have long ago guessed my feelings. However, there is little time left to me now, and even to you, I almost shrink from opening a heart that is nearly maddened with its alternate hopes and fears. My own family do not understand me, with the exception, perhaps, of Fanny, and she is always with Eva—with Miss Herbert I mean—but you, dear, gentle cousin”—here the speaker paused, for the death-like paleness of his companion alarmed him.

Whatever it was that Stuart thought of communicating, the possibility of one thing only occurred to Alice ; and that was his love for herself. When once a cherished idea has taken possession of the mind, we cling to it tenaciously, and the most trifling acts or words minister to its confirmation. And thus it was now with her ; but no dream of happiness, no feeling, even transient, of triumph, mingled with the cold, dead sentiment of despair that followed her conviction that her hopes—forebodings rather—were

verified. She thought of what he would suffer when he learnt her cruel vow, and she recalled her own recent shrinking from the innocent object of all her misery. Would not this be increased now that she was certain of his being the only obstacle to her happiness? and not to hers only—*that* was worse than all! And would a sister's love always triumph? Oh! she feared not! and a deadly sickness of heart seized her.

It was cruel to see the cup raised to her parched lips, and be forced herself to dash it down; but thought followed thought, each more bitter than the last, too rapidly for her already agitated brain to support.

Stuart watched the changes of her countenance in mute surprise, still thinking however it was some sudden illness, and with earnest kindness taking her cold, passive, but white and beautiful hand, he said,—“ Dear Alice, you are ill! what ails you? you have been fatigued with too much watching; lean on me, and we will return to the house.”



His voice, his touch, far from soothing, completely unnerved her. Hastily, with a true woman's instincts, withdrawing the hand he held, she attempted to rise and walk, but the effort failed; her soft eyes opened wildly, and uttering in a tone of touching anguish,—“Oh, my mother!” Alice Norton fainted.

She knew how to love, this pale-faced cousin.

Stuart was very much alarmed, and nearly as much surprised at his usually quiet companion's emotion and sudden illness. He could hardly persuade himself that fatigue and weakness were the only causes. However, this was no time for conjectures. He hastily summoned assistance and had her conveyed to the house, and then sought his mother, to request her warmly to pay more attention to their young relative, and endeavour by soothing kindness to remove the cause of her general depression, and the grief and excitement which she so strangely manifested. He found that lady closetted with Clara, and both in the worst possible humour.

"This comes of having daughters educated by old-fashioned Englishwomen," said Mrs. Aylmer. "It is really too provoking! Now I will venture to say that Clara or Isabel would as soon have thought of appearing at a ball in a cotton dress, or of committing any other dowdy English absurdity, as of being taken ill just as their sister was waiting their presence to be married."

"What is all this about, my dear Madam?" said Stuart anxiously—"who is ill?"

"No one that I know of, but Miss Fanny chooses to pretend to be so, just to provoke her sister and myself; and Mr. Aylmer, with equal thoughtlessness and bad taste, thinks proper to encourage such nonsense."

"Clara, what is it! pray do not keep me in suspense."

"Suspense! *mais c'est trop fort!* my dear Stuart; it is I that am kept in suspense—my marriage was postponed, first, because an old country curate thought proper to die; this I bore with exemplary patience, notwithstanding

Sir Marmaduke's sighs and lamentations. Well, a second day was fixed, the shortest he could possibly consent to, and now comes the news that Fanny is ill, or has been ill, and they cannot return for two or three weeks. I wonder what their ingenuity will *next* devise. I won't undertake to tell Marmaduke. Indeed, if it rested with me, I would not wait for any of them."

Stuart was too much disgusted with this speech to make any other reply, than request to see the letter which mentioned Fanny's illness.

"Oh," replied his mother, "I believe there is one for you from the interesting invalid herself;" and with this, to him most precious gift, Stuart left the ladies to themselves, and forgetting even Alice for the time, shut himself in his own room, and read the following:—

"My ever dear brother,

"The first exertion I am permitted to make, shall be devoted to you—to you, who I know will learn with regret, that I have been

seriously, even dangerously ill.—A cold caught the very evening of our arrival, was followed by a violent fever, from which I am only now recovering. It is very strange that I, who have never, in my recollection, had a day's indisposition before, should be suddenly seized with an illness so severe; I regret it the more on poor Clara's account, whose wedding must be again deferred, for I shall not be able to travel, the doctor says, for two or three weeks. But enough of myself—Mr. Herbert died yesterday week, though they would not tell me of it till the funeral was over. It has been a very mournful time, but how shall I do justice to my darling Eva! She has been indeed a ministering angel to us all. Papa declares that had it not been for her, he could have done nothing; for, of course, my illness alarmed him dreadfully—dear, kind papa, how can we ever love him enough, Stuart! But Eva, I must speak of her, though it is useless to attempt in writing to describe half her goodness; how, while her uncle lived, she divided her time between us,

unmindful of fatigue, and when he died, concealing and struggling with her own dreadful grief, that she might devote herself entirely to me. Oh, if you could see her now, Stuart, with her pale but beautiful face sitting by my bed, and trying every means to amuse and cheer me, when she requires cheering so much herself, you would love her, I am certain, as I do. A new rector has been already appointed, but he very kindly begs us to remain in the house as long as is convenient, though it is not pleasant to know we are keeping out the rightful owner, especially as he has a mother and sister who are rather poor; however, it cannot be helped, and I am sure papa will make it up to them. Miss Stanley, Eva's old governess, is also staying with us. We could not do, you know, without some one, and she is very kind and useful, and devoted to Eva, as indeed, who is not that knows her?

"I have not strength now to write more, or I should tell you what a lovely place this is, but you will not, I trust, be gone when we return.

How do our cousins get on? Do, dear Stuart, write very, very soon, to

“Your loving sister,

“FANNY.”

Stuart was sorely tempted, when he had read this letter, to hasten to Westmoreland and see his sister before he again went abroad, but the imminent danger of his uncle, who had ever been as a parent to him, made him repress the selfish wish—and after having ascertained that his cousin was recovered, he sat down to answer Fanny's letter, too angry and indignant at the utter heartlessness of his mother and Clara, to seek their society again.

Alice had been quickly restored by Margaret, her brother's nurse, who had often seen Mrs. Norton in similar fainting fits, and knew the proper remedies to apply; but with the recovery of consciousness, came all the recollection of her wretchedness, and she would gladly have sunk into that death-like stupor again.

It was strange that she never thought, or seemed to care what her cousin's impression of her sudden fainting would be, neither did she pause to consider what, if he really loved her, could be the cause of his not avowing it more explicitly now.

The only feeling that occupied her mind, was the dread of seeing her brother, lest unholy thoughts might come again. "Heaven help me!" she fervently exclaimed, "my brain is getting bewildered!" And again she sunk on her knees, and prayed for support, yet again the passionate countenance wanted the humility and resignation befitting prayer.

One resolution she made, however—not to see her cousin again. "If he thinks I am indifferent to him, he may forget me. Yes, that is now my only hope. Look down, my mother, and pity the fate you have prepared for me!" And in these expressions of despair, the wretched girl passed many hours. The dinner-time came, and

she sent an excuse for not appearing; wrote a few hurried lines of farewell to be given to Stuart before he started, and then she endeavoured to lose the recollection of her woes in sleep. But this friend of the weary comes not at the bidding of the unhappy, and Alice soon found that solitude and inaction were insupportable. She was rising to steal out into the grounds, when Clara knocked at the door, and before she had time to refuse her admittance, walked in.

“Mama has sent me to see how you are, Alice, for Stuart says you have been fainting, and all that sort of thing. Now let me implore you not to be taken ill just now, or I shall certainly give up my marriage in despair—one has died, a second has been at the point of death, and now I shouldn’t wonder if another is taken with some horrible malady, just to provoke me.” And Clara gave her father’s letter to her companion to read. It was seldom that she had spoken so many words to her quiet cousin, indeed she seldom addressed her at all, for Alice was no favourite with



either mother or daughter ; but Stuart had alarmed them, and, from a benevolent motive, rather perhaps exaggerated the extent of Alice's illness ; so the two ladies now sought to soothe, if possible, the cousin into getting well again, lest this should create a still further delay in Clara becoming " my lady Digby."

Alice returned the letter, and only said she rejoiced that all danger was over with Fanny, and then begged Clara not to be alarmed on her account. " You see I am much better now, it was only a momentary faintness ; I have sat up the last two nights with Maurice."

" Well, pray don't do so silly a thing again ; mama particularly requests that you will leave him to the nurse's charge. The child is well enough, I dare say, only you are so foolishly fond of him."

Alice's pale cheek grew paler at these words, and her heart smote her that she could not acknowledge their truth, but she only replied, " It was my mother's dying charge that I should

never, while I was able, leave him to the care of another."

"Well, then I can only say it was a very selfish and unnatural one, and that it will be still more selfish and unnatural on your part, if you get ill just now—and you positively look more like a corpse than a living woman. Come down stairs with me, instead of sitting moping here; this is Stuart's last night, you know; perhaps you may be able to put him in a good humour—I am sure it is more than I can do, and mama is too cross with him to try."

"What has he done?" said Alice, her heart beating almost audibly, "to offend Mrs. Aylmer?"

"Oh, it is nothing he has done, but something he has chosen to leave undone. The fact is, mama very naturally hoped and expected that he would fall in love with Miss Herbert, or at least with her fortune, which is the same thing, and he, it seems, has disappointed her. For my part, I don't half understand the matter—my

own affairs are quite enough for me to attend to, but I know they have been quarrelling again about it—but come down now, *ma belle cousine*; your society may bring back the truant smiles of my self-willed brother.”

“Excuse me, Clara, I have a letter to write, and a thousand other things to do. I really cannot leave my room this evening.”

“Well, I suppose you must have your own way, but promise to-morrow to take a ride with me and Sir Marmaduke.”

“With pleasure,” replied Alice, too glad to get rid of her companion’s importunities by any means; and she was again left alone; but scarcely had the door closed, so inconsistent is the mind where passion reigns, than she regretted having refused Clara’s request. “I might have seen him once more, just this once. It would be the last, the very last time, and surely it could neither increase my misery nor his; and I could appear as cold and indifferent as I please.”

This reasoning, of course, could lead but to

one result, and her hand was on the handle of the door, when a knock arrested her intention.—It was Margaret, who had been out with Maurice, and she now came to say, that he seemed worse, and more fretful than usual, and would let no one but his sister put him to bed. The struggle was but momentary—long habit of self-denial prevailed.

“Make his couch in my room, Margaret, and bring him here at once.”

The child was brought, and Alice gave up all thoughts of leaving him, and looking on his pale, sad, little face, how could she hate him ! He who clung so fondly to her as his only friend, who was ever so patient and gentle when she was by, who had no pleasures, no amusements, nothing save her love to gladden his darkened lot—and again she inwardly prayed to be delivered from the terrible temptation.

“Alice,” he said softly, as she undressed him, “I have been saying good-bye to *him*—I could not help crying very much, he was always so

kind to me, so different from the others. How happy I should be to live with only you and him—quite, quite alone, we three !”

Alice burst into tears ! “ Ah you cry too, Ally. Is it because he is going ? It must be, for he is good to you too”—then climbing her knee and softly stroking her face, the boy continued, while tears rained down his own little pallid cheek,—“ But do not be unhappy, my own darling Ally, you know I love you more than any thing else in the whole world—oh so dearly ! And I will try and never give you any more trouble, but be always patient and grateful.—And you love me too—don’t you, Ally ?”

“ Love you, Maurice ?”—but her flooding tears prevented Alice saying more.

The blind boy’s simple tenderness had prevailed. The healthful feelings of her mind again came back, and from that moment he was dearer to her than he had ever been.

“ Surely some unholy spell has bound me !” she exclaimed, as she once more, and now it was

indeed a labour of love—watched beside his bed. “How could I ever have thought of hating one so innocent, so helpless, and so affectionate? Oh, if he dies, I shall never, never forgive myself!” And the boy’s pillow was watered with his contrite sister’s tears.

The morning came, and still found that sister a lonely watcher. She could not sleep—it seemed to relieve her mind to devote herself entirely to another. Not that she could do him any good, for the child slept heavily, but she fancied herself less miserable there than anywhere else, and she had kept her post through the long night.

It was day-break when she heard a carriage come to the door, and in another moment, saw Stuart enter it and drive away.

She was roused from a kind of stupor into which she had fallen, by the sound of a painful, dry cough, which continued for many minutes—It came from the bed of Maurice.

CHAPTER XIV.

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- .     " And on from youth to womanhood,  
      Thy weary days shall haste ;  
      Thy happiest feelings turn'd to gall—  
      Thy life itself, a waste !"     •
- 

" ALL is prepared, young ladies," said Miss Stanley, entering the room of the invalid, who was to go down stairs for the first time since her illness,—“ the pillows are placed on the sofa, fresh flowers are gathered, and the tea-table is spread for our guests.”

“ That is all well,” replied Eva, who had grown much paler and thinner within the last few weeks ; and her effort at cheerfulness seemed forced and unnatural, as she added,—“ and now tell me how I have performed the office of lady’s

maid to our invalid. Does she not look very charming?"

"She does, indeed," answered the party addressed, an expression of admiration appearing for a moment on her countenance.

But even Fanny did not smile—for they were in the house of mourning—and the ladies went down stairs together.

The party at Glandale had truly, as the sister had written the brother, been a mournful one of late. The good rector had passed away, calmly and happily in his niece's arms; his grave had been watered by the tears of his little flock, and the dwelling of his manhood and old age, where he had been so fully blessed, was become a stranger's. And though a voice he had dearly loved still lingered there, its tones were sad and low; and even *they* would soon cease to be heard within the parsonage walls. Other hands would tend the flowers he had loved so well, other eyes look on those scenes that had grown so familiar and so dear to him; and



other faces in that little parlour crowd round the winter's hearth. It was sad to think of all this ; and Eva thought of it long after she had seen the damp earth shovelled upon her uncle's coffin—but there had been little time for the indulgence of grief, however sacred and natural. Her friend was then laying at the point of death ; and, stifling the expression of that agony of sorrow which longs to burst into despair, she devoted herself to the care of the daughter and the consolation of the anxious father ; and her sacrifices had been repaid, for the fever abated, and then Fanny rapidly recovered.

The young rector who was Mr. Herbert's successor, so frankly and earnestly pressed his niece and her friends to make the parsonage their home as long as it might be required by them, that all misgivings in regard to that vanished at once. Eva had previously been slightly acquainted with the family, and she introduced the mother and sister to her guardian ; and these were the guests who were

now expected to celebrate Fanny's convalescence, and make her acquaintance too. The latter was most anxious to see the sister and mother of her hermit of the glen, and her companions had smiled at the trouble which she took in choosing from the few dresses which she had brought with her, the one which she imagined the most becoming. It was all settled at length; and as has been said, the three hostesses descended the stairs, to be ready to receive their guests in the oft-mentioned parlour of the parsonage.

"I really wonder papa does not arrive," said Fanny, after enduring a silence of at least a minute and a half. "What can be keeping him?"

"Probably the same cause that is keeping our other visitors," replied Miss Stanley, "for I have no doubt Mr. Aylmer will call for them on his way here."

"Papa is already acquainted with them

then," observed Fanny; "the incomprehensible daughter and all?"

"Incomprehensible, indeed," said Eva; "and yet Charlotte Dacres has never been odd or rude to me. I think I am one of her very few favourites."

"I trust I may be equally fortunate," answered Fanny, with an earnestness that left little doubt of her sincerity.

At this moment Mr. Aylmer was seen coming up the garden; and after affectionately embracing his daughter, and congratulating her on her first appearance down stairs, he explained the cause of his being later than he had anticipated. "The fact is," (addressing Fanny, and presenting her with a packet from her brother,) "I have had letters from your mother and sister, which have surprised less than they have annoyed me. It seems they are very indignant with you, poor Fan, for being ill, and with Miss Herbert and myself for permitting such folly. 'Under other circumstances,' dear

mama very feelingly observes, 'it would not have signified; but in the present case it has deferred Clara's marriage, and therefore nothing could be more ill-timed or ridiculous.' "

The tears stood in Fanny's eyes at this singular proof of her mother's utter indifference to her, which Mr. Aylmer perceiving, continued,—  
" But never mind, Fan, I've had my revenge. Indeed I don't think I have been so angry since your mother insisted on sending your sisters to France—and a pretty business she has made of it. However, as I was going to tell you, I have retaliated on the ladies at Elm Court; for directly I got through the letter, I ordered the carriage, and took a round of some miles to look out for a house in this neighbourhood; and I am happy to say I have succeeded in getting one, just on the other side of the village. And a charming little box it is, I assure you; so if you please, ladies, we will move thither to-morrow, as my little Fan, with those new-blown roses on her cheeks, has no longer an excuse for keeping the

young rector out of his dominions. I had the less hesitation," he continued, "in taking this step, as however much we might have hurried to get home, we should not have been in time to see Stuart before he went to Italy. I dare say you have all the particulars from himself, Fanny; your mama only says that he has heard that my poor brother is worse, and that her son was to start on the morning following the receipt of the news; but cheer up, Fanny, he will soon be back to remain altogether amongst us, I hope."

Eva rose to close the window, while Fanny asked for how long the house had been taken.

"A month certain" was the answer, "and if I have any more saucy letters from Miss Clara, it shall be two. I never approved of her marrying in such haste, and now they will have an opportunity of studying each other's characters—although," continued the father with something between a smile and a sigh, "that may not be much to the advantage of either of them."

Here the conversation was interrupted by the arrival of Mrs. and Miss Dacres, about whom it will be necessary to say a few words before introducing them to the rectory parlour.

The elder of these ladies had nothing particular to distinguish her from the generality of country gentlewomen who have lived all their lives in the same place, seen the same people, and heard the same set of ideas. Mrs. Dacres' father had been a clergyman, her husband had also been a clergyman, and her son was a clergyman, and she had, whether naturally or unnaturally, an unbounded reverence for the profession ; and if she might be said to have a single wish or desire out of the common routine of her every-day existence, it was that her only daughter should marry a clergyman. But although no genius, Mrs. Dacres was a good and a worthy woman, one that is generally described as a "motherly sort of person," and she was devotedly fond and proud of her children, particularly her daughter, which preference

was said to have arisen from Charlotte (such was the young lady's name) having one day been discovered, when a mere child, copying some verses of her own composition, in a school-girl's hand, into her mother's album. It is true she had modestly put "Byron" after them, but the good lady was not to be deceived; and from that time, Charlotte's talents and Charlotte's accomplishments were the constant theme of the delighted mother's tongue, till the object of them herself extreated her parent to choose some other subject to descant upon—and as Charlotte was "always right, and knew what was proper," of course she was obeyed; although at a great sacrifice to her talking mother, who however promised herself compensation for her forbearance at some future day.

In the meantime Charlotte grew to be a woman, and gave up writing verses—at least in her mother's scrap book. How she employed her hours of solitude no one asked, and except her mother or her brother, no one cared; for Miss

Dacres was little liked amongst their neighbours ; and yet she was kind and generous, and even courteous, (although of that courtesy which never loses the hold of the reins of quiet personal dignity,) even courteous she was except where she took a dislike; though those of whom she was fondest never loved her. Many esteemed her, many admired her talents—which really were of a most brilliant order—but whether it was her appearance, which was peculiarly unprepossessing, or her manner, which had always a dash of superciliousness in it, and sometimes something more, no one could easily explain ; but all, in speaking of her, came to the same conclusion, “ I never could love Charlotte Dacres.”

She had herself a vast passion for the beautiful, and her own want of comeliness was the source of many secret tears. If any of the villagers, however poor, had a pretty child, Miss Dacres would not only fondle and caress it, but expend the little money she had at her command in buying it such presents as it liked the best ;



but even these favoured pets themselves gave not love in return ; she felt this to be the case, and the knowledge of it created a bitterness in her character which displayed itself in a singular manner.

Next to her enthusiastic love and admiration of what was beautiful, was her detestation of everything and everybody having the misfortune to be the reverse ; and it may be doubted whether she did not derive more actual gratification in teasing an ugly child, than in caressing a pretty one. When she had an opportunity, these propensities were exercised towards those of larger growth ; but hitherto children and other inferior animals had been almost her only victims, and many of the urchins of Glandale would have preferred seeing the schoolmistress' birch-rod suspended over their heads, to meeting Miss Dacres when they were alone.

But these traits, although they assisted in rendering her disliked, were but as bubbles on the stream. Nature had formed her with a

warm and affectionate heart, strong passions, and a capacity for the deepest and most entire devotion. She had also a sensitive and powerful mind, which, self-directed and uncontrolled, had investigated holy things, and produced infidelity ! Earnestly she had prayed to Heaven to take the darkness from her soul, earnestly she had desired to be a believer again, and much had she examined the evidences of Holy Writ, and the abstract reasoning in favour of life after death ; but doubt still remained ; and though she made her attention to the dictates of religion a solemn duty, and sometimes hoped that she might become a believer again—it was not so ; the aspirations of her heart and soul were checked, and their fire turned back again upon themselves.

One being alone she seemed to love with a feeling of attachment, which rose beyond distinctive relations of character—this was her brother. And he, on his part, was both fond and proud of her ; but it was not with him an absorbing emotion ; and he often regretted that

one, possessed of the deepest feeling herself, appeared so deficient in the power of exciting affection in others. But so it was; and Charlotte Dacres had reached the age of twenty-two with all her passionate yearnings for human sympathy and human love unsatisfied!

If she had had but one friend, one to whom she could have opened her heart, and spoken of the thousand thoughts that haunted and distracted her, because they were all unshared—if she could have felt that one human being, independent of the instincts of kindred, really loved her, she might in some degree have been happy. The world would have worn a fairer aspect, and her whole existence have been changed; but it was not to be; and the affections of her nature, thus repulsed, changed to gall and bitterness, and she learned to hate the world, because it loved not her.

But it is time now that both the mother and daughter should be introduced to those, on whose fate the latter was destined to exercise hereafter

no inconsiderable influence. Mr. Aylmer, after greeting them warmly, presented his daughter, near whom Mrs. Dacres instantly took a seat, and entered into conversation ; while Charlotte, as was her usual custom, sat apart and spoke to nobody.

Fanny answered the questions of the kind old gentlewoman courteously, and spoke of her own admiration of Glandale, which admiration, she explained, had in fact led to her illness ; but her whole attention was directed towards the silent sister, and a strange and uncomfortable feeling grew upon her, as she two or three times caught those large, intelligent eyes directed towards herself. Determined, however, if possible, to conciliate the singular being, she turned at length and addressed her in the most winning tone, expressing her regret at keeping the family out of their new home so long. "It is such a beautiful place," she added, "that I am sure you can never forgive me for having deferred your enjoyment of it."

"I am not fond of anything new," was all the answer she received.

This was a most unpromising commencement ; but Fanny, not yet daunted, continued,—“I hope you do not carry that principle so far as to dislike seeing new scenes and new faces, for papa has quite set his heart upon your accompanying us back to Derbyshire, and you surely will not deny us all this pleasure ?”

“Your papa is very kind,” said Charlotte, and she looked as though she meant it, “but mama has only one daughter, and I have never left her.”

“Oh, don’t think of me, dear child !” said the mother. “Since Miss Aylmer is so kind as to ask you, I am sure you ought to go. It will do you a world of good, and you have been moped to death here.”

For a moment there came a faint tinge of colour on Charlotte’s cheek, and a still keener sparkling in the large, bright eye, as she turned to Mr. Aylmer and said,—“Since my mother

approves of my going, I shall have great pleasure in accepting your very kind invitation ;” and then sinking back in her chair, she spoke not another word during the evening.

Mrs. Dacres, on hearing the intended removal of the family on the morrow, protested loudly against it, assuring them they were welcome to the house for six months longer if they pleased, and that her son would be very much annoyed if they thought of moving before they quitted Glandale ; but Mr. Aylmer convinced her that it was all settled, and then she said, turning to Fanny,—“ By the bye, you have seen Edward, Missy ; I think you met in the hermitage, the night of your arrival. I am sure he will be very proud to be introduced to you.”

It was no faint blush that mantled on Fanny’s cheek as she detected the dark eyes from the corner again bent sharply on her, during this speech. The look absolutely terrified her ; so much so that Eva, fancying she seemed ill, begged her not to sit up longer ; and Mrs. Dacres

eagerly joining in the request, the invalid gladly followed their advice, and hurriedly expressing a hope that she should soon see her new friends again (although in her heart she limited the wish to one,) retired from the room, accompanied by Miss Stanley.

When left alone, Fanny took out her brother's letter to read ; but even while thus employed, the cold, piercing eyes of Charlotte Dacres seemed to pursue her, and she could not close her own till she heard the house door shut upon the visitors about an hour after. And yet it was impossible to account for the antipathy she felt towards this strange being. It is true she had repulsed, almost rudely, her attempts at familiarity ; but Fanny was prepared to find her eccentric, and would readily have pardoned that or more, but a shadow had been cast on the path of this young and light-hearted girl that might not be removed. She had something now, although undefined, to think anxiously of, and to

dread, and the bright sunshine of her life was dimmed. The Fates had woven the first black thread in poor Fanny Aylmer's destiny the night she became acquainted with Charlotte Dacres.



CHAPTER XV.

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"Sister, you'll miss no light, glad step,  
You'll miss no voice of glee,  
My darken'd lot was hard to bear,  
And I've borne it wearily."

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"CLARA, I protest my nerves won't stand much more of this opposition of your father's—another month! it's really enough to disgust any lover: Sir Marmaduke looked cross enough when I told him it was a fortnight—but a month! and all to provoke me, I know it is, and I declare my nerves won't stand it!"—

"I don't know the extent of the capability for endurance of your nerves, mama, but I have pretty well calculated my own powers of suffer-

ance, and I'm quite determined not to stand it a single week longer, so you may just take your choice of allowing the preparations for the wedding to go on, and getting old Dr. Northcott to give me away, or having the scandal and absurdity of an elopement, where there has been no obstacle to the match on either side.

“ My dear Clara, I'm in no humour for jesting, I assure you, with a thousand *désagréments* threatening us.”

“ And, my dear mama, you are perfectly convinced that I, who never trouble myself to jest at any time, am not likely to begin now.”

“ Then do me the favour to explain your meaning.”

“ That is easily done, and in a very few words. It may suit you and papa to do all in your respective powers to vex and annoy each other, but it does not suit me, or my intended husband to become the victims of these little matrimonial pleasantries; and therefore my mind is completely made up to be married next week.—It

remains with you to decide whether the ceremony takes place, sanctioned by your presence, in what people call a respectable manner, or in a way that they may give any name to they please."

"Clara, are you mad ! You know I dare not act in direct opposition to your father's commands ; does not his letter, which he has evidently written in a passion, because we did not sympathise enough with that silly baby Fanny, does not his letter say distinctly, "if your daughter marries before my return, remember *I* never see *her* again, and she never sees a penny of my money ?"

"All nonsense, mama ; I thought you had more sense than to believe what a person says or writes when in a passion ; besides, Sir Marma-  
duke has enough money for us both."

"But how do you know that he will agree to this silly scheme of yours, Clara, even if you can so far forget the natural delicacy of your sex as to propose it ?"

"Oh, leave all that to me, mama, and if you have my delicacy at heart, let me assure you

that Sir Marmaduke himself, when hearing of this second delay, urged and implored me to disregard such trifling obstacles, or consent at least to a private marriage in the meantime."

"Well, I can only say then, that he is a greater fool than I took him to be; but this ardent lover probably did not suspect that a penniless bride would be his portion, if his solicitations were attended to. Show him your father's letter, and if *that* does not transform him into a very model, and preacher of patience, never trust to my penetration again."

"Do me the credit, *chère maman*, to believe that I am at least as clear-sighted as yourself, with probably a little more determination of character, and contempt of your idol called the World—acquired during a three year's residence in '*La belle France*.' And now I will leave you to your meditations; weigh well all the *pros* and *cons* of my case, and when we meet at dinner, your final answer will greatly oblige, your truly affectionate and dutiful daughter, Clara."

And so saying, this dutiful and affectionate daughter left the bewildered mother to herself.

And very pleasant and profitable were that mother's self-communings during the next two hours; but it is with the result of them only that the reader has to do, which was communicated to her daughter at the time appointed.

"Clara," said she, on entering the drawing-room just before dinner was announced, "I have acceded to the request you made, that I would give mature consideration to your very extraordinary, and I must add, ungrateful and undutiful intentions, and the result is my determination to have no hand in so flagrant an instance of disobedience. Moreover, it is my resolve to write, by this night's post, to your father, that he may take measures to prevent so shocking and improper a thing as an elopement. For myself, I feel my nerves so shattered by all this unusual excitement, that I am incapable of any exertion."

"My dear mama, it is a pity you did not

spare yourself the exertion of so long a speech, since your nerves are in such an unpleasant state. The first clause of it would have answered every purpose, for, of course, any steps you may take to prevent a thing that I have once determined upon doing, must be a matter of perfect indifference to me."

"Clara, you will break my heart, if you persist in this unfeeling conduct."

"I really was not aware that you were troubled with such an inconvenient commodity," was the answer, and here this pleasant little *tête-à-tête* was interrupted by the entrance of Margaret, Maurice Norton's nurse.

"If you please, Ma'am, Miss Alice can't leave her brother, and she begs you will not send her any dinner, as she could not eat it."

"What is the matter now? I'm sick of that cross child's ailments," was the ungracious reply.

"If you please, Ma'am, Master Maurice is never cross, and his ailments are bad enough, God knows! However, he won't be in the way of sick-

ening anybody long," continued the old servant indignantly. "The poor child is dying!" And she raised her apron to wipe away the tears this mournful prophecy had brought to her eyes.

"Dying! absurd twaddle! he's been dying in years and his sister's imagination ever since he came here!"

"Miss Alice wants to know if one of the grooms can be spared, to go to Dr. Northcott," said the woman, not deeming any reply necessary to this last observation.

"Certainly not! my servants have something else to do than running over the country to gratify the ridiculous whims of an ill-tempered child and his hypochondriacal attendants."

Mrs. Aylmer was glad of an opportunity of venting her ill humour on those who had no power to resent it.

"Then what is to be done, Ma'am! Dr. Northcott lives, they say, seven miles off, and even if I could walk so far, I should not be back to-night;

and the sweet lamb may be dead by that time. He is in a high fever, and coughs without ceasing."

"So you have said the last four or five days, but really, my good woman, I cannot have my nerves irritated by hearing about fevers and death and all that sort of thing. Give the child some lozenges, and tell Miss Norton that the next time any of the men have to ride that way, they shall call upon the doctor."

The old servant had barely patience to wait for the conclusion of this speech, when hastening to her young mistress, she repeated, word for word, what had passed, adding, "Ah, Miss, if Mr. Stuart had been here, or even his good father, you would not have been treated so."

"Alas! my poor Margaret," said the weeping girl, "I have neither the power nor the right to resent it, but my brother must not be sacrificed, for all that I am a poor dependent cousin. Go instantly and order my poney to be saddled, they cannot at least refuse to do that for me. I will ride myself to Dr. Northcott."



The old nurse loved her young and suffering charge too dearly to offer any opposition to the only plan that suggested itself for affording him relief, so without a word, she hastened to obey his sister's command, and in another half hour, while Mrs. Aylmer and her loving daughter (Mrs Nathan being this day indisposed) were still railing and recriminating over their preserved ginger and Madeira, Alice Norton, on the poney Stuart had given her, was wending her solitary way, under the old park elms, whose yellow leaves whirled and danced about her in the gusts of the autumn wind.

A quick ride soon brought her to the doctor's house, who was fortunately at home. Alice was not known to him personally, but he had heard that the Aylmers had a young cousin living with them, and her errand was quickly told.

"I will return with you instantly, my dear young lady ; but how comes it, in such an establishment as Mrs. Aylmer's, that no one could be found to fetch me but yourself, who look as if

you wanted a doctor as much as your brother. You will pardon the question, but it seems such a strange thing for a young girl to be galloping seven miles alone, and living too in a house full of servants."

"I did not stay to question the propriety, or the look of the thing, when an only brother's life was in danger," replied Alice, mournfully. "Indeed I would gladly venture far more than this, to procure him even an hour's rest: besides, you forget that I am a poor dependent cousin," she continued bitterly, forgetting in the agony of the moment that she was speaking to a stranger, "and have no right to send the servants hither and thither. But indeed I ought to add that Mrs. Aylmer refuses to believe that Maurice is in any danger."

"Well, well, we will hope that in this case she may turn out right. While I am preparing to accompany you, my wife shall come and keep you company."

Alice was on the point of begging to be left

alone ; but the good-natured doctor had already disappeared, and in another minute a middle-aged, lady-like person entered the room, and taking a seat near the young girl, endeavoured to engage her in conversation. But Alice was in no mood for talking, and she felt very thankful that she was not kept long waiting.

During their ride to Elm Court, the reader must return for a few minutes to those he left so agreeably conversing together there.—Mrs. Aylmer's troubles, or, as she called them, "*désagréments*," were indeed thickening fast upon her—that very morning she had received the following concise but decisive letter from Isabella's *dear* friend, with whom she (Isabel) had spent the summer.

" Madam,

" I shall feel obliged by your letting me know, as soon as possible, when it will be convenient for you to receive your daughter.

" I am, Madam,

" Your obedient servant,

" LAURA DE VILLEMONT."

Now, although this was not exactly intelligible to the perplexed parent, it was clear to her, that there was something wrong—that Isabella had conducted herself in a manner that was at least displeasing to her very dear friend, for had not that friend virtually said, “the sooner your daughter leaves my house the better?” This, in all conscience, was bad enough for one day, but at the same time came her husband’s indignant reply to her unfeeling comments on her youngest daughter’s illness, expressing his determination to remain another month, or perhaps more, at Glandale, and his command that Clara should not be married until he returned, on pain not only of his lasting displeasure, but of forfeiting the whole of the thirty thousand pounds intended as the marriage portion of each of his children. It must not be supposed that Mrs. Aylmer, with all her follies, could not have made up her mind in a case of necessity to bear with some degree of patience a few weeks’ delay in the display of wedding favours, and the gratification

of hearing her daughter styled "my lady," but she reflected that unfortunately these few weeks, just at this particular time, might alter the whole aspect of affairs ; for how could she tell, if that 'thoughtless Isabella' had really done anything to disgrace herself and friends, whether the bridegroom elect might choose to unite himself so nearly with a family thus circumstanced ? The chances were that he would at once withdraw his suit, and then where would be all the brilliant castles that, since she had gained her point in sending her girls to her well-beloved France, her soaring imagination had delighted to build. Echo only answered, where ? and so her spirit had truly wept over the fearful jeopardy into which these airy mansions of her mind had become placed.

If her husband's very decided letter had not arrived at that inauspicious moment, she would have readily consented to Clara's wish to have the marriage preparations completed at once, and the ceremony performed with all convenient

dispatch; but she had not quite the courage necessary to disobey a command couched in such positive terms, and so her next care was to prevent her daughter seeing the letter of the Comtesse de Villemont; for to Clara's mind she knew it would convey the same impression it had already done to her own, and perhaps induce her to take some step that would render matters a little worse than they at present were.

But Clara *had* managed to get a sight of it unknown to her mother, and her resolution was instantly formed, and as speedily communicated to her worthy parent—worthy indeed of such a daughter. The result of this has been shown, and it now only remains to detail the scene in which they both ended their disputes by agreeing to act in concert.

The *tête-a-tête* dinner had passed in almost total silence, enlivened only by an occasional ejaculation from Mrs. Aylmer, bearing reference to the trouble and annoyance occasioned by de-

pendent cousins, and cross children, to all of which her agreeable companion answered not a word. But the dessert came, and a glass or two of old Madeira somewhat amended their respective tempers, or at least rendered them less disposed to taciturnity. Mrs. Aylmer began to reason with her daughter on the extreme folly of the step she meditated ; and her daughter in return condescended to argue its expediency, at the same time declaring it a matter of perfect indifference to her whether she convinced her listener or not.

“ But, Clara,” added the mother, “ you have given no reason besides a childish impatience to become a married woman, for yielding so easily a handsome fortune ; to say nothing of incurring your father’s eternal anger, and making yourself a laughing-stock to all your friends.”

“ My dear mama, it will save us both a world of trouble, of useless questions and answers, if I tell you at once that I read the letter you were so anxious to keep from me, and though I

seldom trouble myself to feel surprised at anything, I must say that in this case I am astonished that you should not enter into my views, and endeavour to have the marriage over before any unfortunate *denouement* takes place with Bella. What she has been doing, goodness knows ! I suppose flirting with that French count ; however, *ce n'est pas mon affaire*, I only wish she had delayed exposing herself a few weeks longer. As it is, I am determined not to be a victim. When we are once married, Sir Marmaduke must make the best of any little untoward affair of this sort, as he will then be one of the family ; and besides, *chère maman*, I must tell you I am really fond of my intended husband, and would not lose him on any account."

"I am glad to hear it, Clara, for your sake, and his too ; but think you he would not resent your concealing from him the fact that by marrying before your father's return, you forfeit the whole of your marriage portion ; even supposing



he should be brought to overlook any disgrace your unfortunate sister may bring upon us?"

"Mama, it is my maxim never to meet troubles half way ; there may be certain little *désagrémens* in the marriage state that it is impossible wholly to avoid ; but it is in my own power to escape the much greater *désagrément* of not being married at all ; and that I am resolved on doing. Sir Marmaduke is fortunately so much in love as to be very impatient of these continued delays ; and, as I before told you, has more than once urged me to wait for no one. I believe he really is afraid when the country houses fill, and society thickens upon us, that I may see some one more attractive than himself, and change my mind after all. Poor Marmaduke ! he is not very handsome ; and there is a Sir Felix Vaine coming on a visit to somebody in the neighbourhood, that I can plainly perceive he is dreadfully jealous of. They say this new man is an Adonis, and turns the heads and hearts too of all the ladies he condescends to notice. However, I

hope to be 'over the hills and far away' before the fair and expectant maidens of Derbyshire are exposed to his fascinations."

"Well, Clara, I must confess I cannot avoid seeing things just in the same light with yourself, and would gladly, if I dared, expedite your union; but you must be aware that it is wholly out of my power to assist you—and yet an elopement would be so disgraceful."

"Exactly so; and exceedingly fatiguing to me besides—*mais quoi faire ?*"

"Stay, Clara; if you will promise faithfully not to inculcate me in the affair, I will do my best to help you; that is to say, I will put no obstacle in your way. You can settle with Sir Marmaduke, who, I must say (*en passant*), is a fool—to meet you some morning at Relmhurst; he, of course, will provide a licence, with a clergyman, and all that sort of thing; and when the ceremony is over, you must persuade him to come and implore my pardon. Your father, I fear, will be inflexible; but I

shall, of course, pretend that it was all without my knowledge; and, as you say, anything is preferable to having the whole thing *bouversé*. And now hasten your preparations. I must go to Mrs. Nathan, and beg her to take the carriage on Thursday to meet Isabel; the old toady is better than nobody, for I am sure *I* am too ill to go out; and your sister, I fancy, is still wise enough to keep her secrets from such a notorious gossip."

"But have you written to La Comtesse?"

"Of course, I could not do otherwise. I told her the carriage should meet my daughter early on Friday; she will doubtless be too happy to get rid of her guest, to refuse the use of her own for part of the journey."

This explanatory conversation need be pursued no farther, but leaving the interesting pair to their renewed confidence and good understanding, the reader must follow Dr. Northcott and his trembling companion to the room of the little sufferer.

"You will not deceive me," said Alice, as they advanced to the bedside, and looked on the flushed cheek of the invalid, who had fallen into a heavy sleep.

"You say your brother has had the cough some months?" replied the doctor.

"More or less, but these last few days it has increased fearfully. I never thought his illness dangerous till now, for he was always a delicate child; but—tell me, pray, tell me at once what you think of him?"

"My dear Miss Norton, calm yourself. At any rate there seems no immediate danger, but I shall be able to judge better when he awakes. In the meantime——"

He was interrupted by a violent fit of coughing from the boy, who now opened his eyes. The physician took the little burning hand in his, and Alice turned to note the expression of his face while he counted the unequal pulses; but no comfort could be derived from the grave and concerned look that answered her own.

"My poor child," said the doctor, addressing the sufferer, "is there anything you would like to have?"

"Whose voice is it, Alice?" faltered the almost exhausted boy—not *his*, I know, and who else cares for poor Maurice here?"

"It is a kind gentleman, darling, who is come to do you good. "Tell him all you feel, and he will relieve your cough."

"He must be kind, indeed, Alice, to come to me; but, Ally, I do not mind my cough now. Mama has been to me since you were away—my own darling, good mama; and she told me that I should go to her, and sleep in her arms, as I used to do, and never feel pain again. And, oh, more than all! I should see her face, which I always so longed to do; and many bright and beautiful things beside—and I am so very happy, dear Ally, for you know mama never deceived me."

"You have been dreaming, my pet," said the agitated sister, struggling to check the

rising sob, while the old doctor rubbed his eyes to hide the tears that were gushing in them.

“No, Alice, I am sure it was not a dream—I heard mama’s voice so plainly.”

Another and a longer fit of coughing succeeded, and the doctor forbade him speaking more; then drawing Alice gently from the room, he replied to her supplicating looks—“I must not deceive you, my dear young lady. Your brother is very, very ill; and unless we can relieve that frightful cough, I cannot answer for the consequences. The chief fear is that a blood-vessel will break, but great care may prevent this, and then all may yet be well. Now do not give way to violent grief at present, when every exertion you can make will be required. Take moderate rest yourself, and remember that all things are ordained for the best. I will call early to-morrow; and now I am going to insist upon seeing Mrs. Aylmer; she must send some of her lazy servants for the medicines.” And kindly taking the hand of his pale and silent companion, Dr. Northcott

left the room, when Alice again hastened to her brother's side.

It was a time of bitter trial, this anxious scene, for Alice Norton. How thankfully would she have devoted the remainder of her own life so that he might have been spared; how joyfully have yielded every hope of future happiness to bid that patient sufferer live! And yet she knew that he was going to a place of rest—that the world had no charms for him, and that death would be a welcome friend. Ah, who so well as she could know the weary load existence had been to that afflicted child! Why then should her grief appear so hopeless, and what could mean the restless wandering of that burning eye?

It was a morbid feeling that had been growing upon her mind, a dread which continually haunted her that she had ill-performed her sacred promise to her mother—that greater kindness, more untiring attention might have spared her brother's life; and when she listened to the words that nearly excluded hope of his recovery, a weight seemed to fall upon her heart, and a

voice to whisper, "*You have done this !*" In vain her reason tried to combat the horrid idea, her mind, weakened by recent suffering, clung with fearful tenacity to the impression it had imbibed. Every fond caress the boy bestowed, seemed a reproach to her—more and more full of anguish grew the sister's troubled thoughts, as her brother's low and mournful voice fell upon her ear.

"How kind, how very kind you are, Alice !" he said, pressing her hand closely between his own burning palms ; "I have always been a trouble to you, and you will be happier when I am gone to mama. Do not cry so, my own darling Ally, for I know you will be happy ; you are so good and kind ; and *he* will come again, and love you, for he always told me I ought to love my beautiful sister, dearly,—he knew how good you were. And you will talk sometimes together of poor Maurice, Alice—but oh never, never wish, when I am gone, to have me back again—I should not like to stay in this dull, dark world. The days to me have always been



so long, Ally, and the nights often and often longer and duller still, when I have lain awake for hours, and counted the minutes as they passed ; and sometimes I have got up to come to you that you might talk to me, I was so lonely ! but then I have heard you sobbing in your sleep, and thought you might be unhappy too, though I could not tell why, for you were not blind, Alice ; and so I have turned again and prayed that I might die and go to mama. I do not think God will be angry with me for this, because He knows how lonely I was, and how hard it is to live in a world that every one says is beautiful, and never, never see it !”

“ You must not talk, my own dear brother,” said Alice, as the boy sank back into her arms, after another fit of coughing.

“ Kiss me then, dear Ally, and keep my hand in yours, and I will try to sleep ; for then I shall hear the soft and lovely voices that came to me before ; and mama will tell me when I am to go to her. I know she wants me,

Alice, very, very much, but I am faint and cold."

As Maurice spoke, his head drooped upon the pillow, and the wretched sister thought for an instant that death had come; but it was not so, for in another moment she felt again the feeble pressure of the burning little hand. "Where do you suffer now, dearest?" she asked, tenderly bending to kiss the flushed and wasted cheek.

"I do not suffer much, dear Ally," he replied in a still more feeble and broken voice, "not much, and it will be but for a short time. I know mama would not deceive me, and you will be happy when I am gone to her, will you not Alice?"

Happy! how that word thrilled through every nerve of the miserable girl. What had she to do with happiness? What mockery there seemed in the simple word to one whose mind was agonized like hers; but she stifled the choking sob, and tried to speak some words

of comfort to her dying brother. It was a strange and mournful contrast those two young creatures presented ; the boy with his blue eyes fixed in melancholy vacancy, and a wasting disease visible in every feature, but spite of all, a look of peace and hopefulness beaming from them, as though already he had some foretaste of the heaven of light and happiness to which he was going. And then to turn to the pale and wo-stricken sister. Her disease was in the mind alone, but oh the difference it created in their aspects. No peace or hope shone from those wandering eyes ; they were blue too, and beautiful, but their expression now was painful to see. The woman who had known her from infancy shuddered at the wildness of the young girl's look when they asked her to leave her brother and take some rest herself. Mrs. Aylmer, roused at last to a sense of Maurice's danger, came to the room and insisted on Alice leaving her post ; but the sister heeded her not. At length they advanced to force her com-

pliance, seeing that she was in no state to witness the parting-scene, which the child's rapidly increasing exhaustion proclaimed to be near. Then the unhappy girl, with a loud cry, warned them to desist, but that strange sound in the quiet room startled the feeble boy; again he coughed more violently than ever, and they saw with dismay the red blood trickling slowly from his poor little mouth.

"It is all over, then!" cried Alice, sinking on her knees by his side, from whence none now thought of removing her. "My brother, my only brother, must you die!" she continued to murmur, passionately kissing the little hands that drooped on the counterpane when the paroxysm of coughing had passed. "Margaret, dear Margaret, do not tell me there is no hope; look at him! oh, look! he is not so very pale now; surely, surely something may be done."

And the only thing that suggested itself was done; a strong opiate being applied, the boy

sank again into a calm, deep sleep, and then the attendants yielded at length to Alice's earnest entreaties, to leave her alone to watch him.

And if lonely hours of unshared and despairing agony, and burning tears that scorched instead of soothing the heart whose bitterness they sprung from; if these could summon death then Alice Norton had never seen another dawn; for such hours and such tears were now hers; and if, when watching by her mother's dying bed, she had been tempted to pray for a release from the sufferings and cares of this world, how much sorer was that temptation now! And slowly and heavily lagged the weary time, while Maurice still slept the unruffled sleep that opium produces, the deathlike silence of the room, only broken by an occasional sob from the miserable watcher, that mingled with the howling of the fierce night-wind from without.

At length, while Alice was bending over the sleeper, to ascertain if his breathing was still

calm and regular, she was startled by a low, but heavy sigh, and immediately after the little hand of Maurice moved feebly as if in search of something.

"I am here, dearest," said his sister, fondly kissing his cold, white cheek, "tell me now how you feel."

"Not worse, Alice, but are we quite alone?" was the scarcely audible answer.

"Quite, darling, and none other shall come near you if you do not like it."

"Alice," he continued, now almost in a whisper, "I have seen mama again, and I am going to her very, very soon, but oh, Ally! I love you dearly, dearly too; I have always loved you so, and wished to be a man, and that I was not blind for your sake, to take care of you, dearest Ally, and save you from every danger; and oh! it was so dreadful to know that I could never, never do this, but be always a pain and a trouble to you instead. Can you wonder, then, that I should like to die? You

must not be angry, Ally, or think me wicked in feeling happy now; indeed, indeed, I love you more than I could ever tell. Put your arms round me, sister. I am so cold, and let me touch your dear face once again. Now give me your hand, and speak to me, Alice—I cannot—one kiss!—one more—dear, dear—”

The trembling voice faded to an indistinct murmur. The little hand that had so tightly clasped his sister's, relaxed its hold. A wild shriek arose, and for an instant the winds seemed hushed, by that more fearful sound. It was the cry of Alice Norton, and announced that the blind boy was dead!

## CHAPTER XVI.

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" Her lot is on you, silent tears to weep,  
And patient smiles to wear through suffering's  
hour;  
Of sunless treasures, from affection's deep,  
To pour on broken reeds a wasted shower."

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AGAIN the reader must return to the peaceful solitudes of sweet Glandale, and again wander with Fanny Aylmer through its silent valleys, and trace the progress of her growing love. The once light-hearted girl was changed—changed in aspect and in the other characters of "presence." Her eye was anxious and



thoughtful, and her step was womanlike and grave. The fine light figure had lost that girlishness which the merry looks of the beaming face had given it, and the low-falling shoulders, the delicate bust, and graceful carriage became the attributes of a more perfect state of loveliness than belongs to girlhood. At times, indeed, her natural, reckless gaiety burst forth, but it was almost immediately succeeded by a depressing gloom; and sometimes an impatient fretfulness—never till now observed in her character. Her father, who watched her with all the anxiety of the most devoted affection, imagined these latter changes were occasioned by the remains of her recent illness, and tried every means to rouse her from these occasional fits of despondency; but Eva understood the symptoms better, for she knew that Fanny loved, and as yet had had no sign of being loved again—and that, she thought, was cause enough for even greater dejection.

To Miss Stanley, the sincere friend of both,

she communicated her impression, and the answer confirmed her fears.

"You are right, Eva," said she, "that interesting girl is certainly deeply attached to the young clergyman, a likely enough person to obtain the love of such a pure-hearted being as she; but I fear the passion is not in any way returned by him."

"Not love her in return! Oh, who could know Fanny Aylmer one day, and not love her? But he does not know of her attachment."

"Few men, Eva, are blind to that."

"Oh, why, why, when love is true and devoted," continued Eva, walking faster as she spoke, "why should it not be always mutual?"

"That is a difficult question to answer," replied her companion smiling, "and would have puzzled me exceedingly had you asked it in your days of scholarship. But to return to poor Fanny—I really fear her case is hopeless, for even if Edward Dacres should at length return

her love, I feel convinced that 'doure and deadly' sister of his—as our neighbours across the Tweed have it—would never let him marry.”

“Nay, that is a ridiculous apprehension. Let him only love her, and I shall fear no sister, or mother either, however doure or deadly. Surely love is a stronger passion than brotherly or filial affection?” continued Eva, turning her fine dark eyes to her companion’s countenance.

“Undoubtedly, love in the abstract is so, but not the love that he will ever feel for Fanny Aylmer.”

“You speak in riddles, my dear Miss Stanley; why, if he loves her at all, should not his love be as entire and devoted as her own?”

“Because, as Lord Byron — no favourite poet of yours, Eva—”

“Nay, I admire him much, and think him a very great poet, as all the world must do.”

“Yet you do not *like* him. You prefer the fresh flowers of Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, to the sulphury fireworks of Byron,

‘with his dark-lantern passion, as artificial as his mind.’”

“You are mistaken if you think you are quoting me. I confess I prefer the poetry of those you have mentioned, to the beautiful compositions of Byron and Moore—perhaps it is because the former are more natural, and suggest thought, while the latter cloy the fancy and burden the imagination like the effect produced by the dazzle of a jeweller’s shop. Oh, that ‘Ode to the Skylark’ of dear Shelley’s!” cried Eva, with enthusiasm, ‘and that darling Genevieve! by Coleridge, and those glorious sonnets of Wordsworth’s, standing in their own noble beauty, like ancient statues on a waste — every time I read them I feel my heart nearer to heaven, and my love for all that is good increase. I have no such delightful feelings after reading Byron or Moore, therefore I like my own poets the best, whatever may be thought of their respective merits. But you were about

to quote Byron about something connected with Edward Dacres."

"I was about to say, that the reason why I believed his attachment to Fanny Aylmer could never be of a very devoted kind, was that his heart, poetically speaking, is darkened by the shadow of another; its treasures are still poured on a thankless shrine; and if ever reason and religion enable him to recal them, they will be but a poor offering to another."

Eva was silent.

"To speak more plainly," continued Miss Stanley, "Edward Dacres has loved once too enthusiastically, to feel that passion in the same degree a second time. And, Eva, you must be aware of this. There are some things that woman's eye is quick to see. But forgive me," she added, observing her companion look distressed—"I would not for a moment jest on this subject. It may be that you never guessed his love, though it was plain enough to everybody else. I can see, Eva, that he feels its

hopelessness, and struggles with it, and I should even hope that in time his heart might turn with less passionate but perhaps more enduring feelings towards our sweet Fanny, were it not, as I said before, for the influence of his sister."

"But why do you imagine she has such great influence over him ; and if she has, why should she exert it against my Fanny?"

"My dear Eva, if your mind were not occupied with hopes and fears of its own, you could not avoid seeing that Charlotte Dacres hates your pretty little friend. For some reason, best known to herself, she has made up her mind (I am sure of it) that Edward shall never marry ; and Fanny's attachment betrays itself in every word and look. With regard to her influence over him, it is merely that which an earnest and powerful mind always possesses, more or less, over a sensitive and noble one. Edward is single-hearted, trusting, and affectionate ; Charlotte is cunning, determined, and unscrupulous——"

"Oh, stop! stop! my dear Miss Stanley. Surely you would not heap more detestable epithets on the poor girl. I allow she is not exactly what is called amiable, but still there is something about her that interests me exceedingly. She gives me the idea of a person suffering under some acute disappointment."

"Exactly so. That is the secret of her character. She is miserable because she is plain and unloveable, and the study of her life is to make all around her equally so."

"Nay, nay, now you *are* severe, and, I am sure, unjust; Charlotte has many noble qualities."

"Then," said the prim but worthy lady, "she succeeds better in hiding her light under a bushel, than any one I ever knew."

"I know you are very much above the follies of your sex," retorted Eva, her spirit rising against this seeming injustice, "but I did not think you had been above its charities."

Miss Stanley smiled, for she was well accus-

tomed to such petulances from the warm heart of her former pupil; and she merely replied, calmly and affectionately, "My unnoticed position, Eva, has made me a tolerable judge of woman's character, and I have rarely found myself deceived. You will discover, in the end, that I am right."

"Well, we will not speak more about her, dear," said Eva, affectionately pressing the arm of her companion. "Where, I wonder, is Fanny?"

"I begged her to lie down till dinner-time; she walked too far this morning—for she is still very weak. I threatened her with not going to church to-morrow, if she looks pale, and she became obedient at once."

"Her whole soul seems set upon hearing him preach. I wish we could prevent it, for Edward is eloquent and accomplished enough to win a heart that is not prepossessed in his favour."

"And yet yours remains untouched."



"Mine ! oh yes. I never dreamt of loving Edward Dacres."

"Nor any one else, Eva !"

"Come, I think we have talked enough about the tender passion for one sitting. We will defer my confessions till another time."

"As you please, dear child. I only hope you have a fairer chance of happiness than poor Fanny."

"Thank you, my own kind friend ; and rest assured, that whenever I need a confidant or adviser, you will be the one I shall choose."

This conversation took place about a fortnight after the family had removed from the Rectory. Since the letters which excited Mr. Aylmer's displeasure, no news whatever had been received from Elmcourt, and they were consequently in total ignorance of the changes that had taken place there. With the Dacres most of their time was spent. Charlotte, from some unknown reason, chose to make herself agreeable to the father ; Edward, without choosing

it, had won the pure and affectionate heart of the daughter ; and Miss Stanley and Eva willingly put up with the society and matter-of-small-fact conversation of that worthiest of domestic gentlewomen, Mrs. Dacres, to accommodate the rest of the party.

And in this state of acquaintance they would wander together in those beautiful scenes ; and Fanny's love increased day by day, and hope and fear by turns predominated. Edward Dacres was a delightful companion, to say nothing of his genial and high-bred courtesy ; moreover, he was extremely handsome, and though his features were most delicately cut, his aspect and mien were manly, even noble. When Charlotte was away, everything looked bright to Fanny ; and as he talked to her of serious things, and spoke of his plans for the improvement of his little flock, and his anxious wish to be to them as good a pastor as Mr. Herbert had been, she could not but hope that the same feelings were growing in his mind

that already so entirely engrossed her own; and that he looked forward to her, his ever-attentive listener, eventually sharing with him those delightful labours of Christian charity; but the moment Charlotte, with her cold, piercing eyes, appeared, all hope and joyousness vanished, and poor Fanny felt like a culprit in the presence of her judge.

On the evening of this day, Edward Dacres sat in the little parlour of the Rectory, engaged in the composition of his sermon for the morrow; that is to say, the paper and pens were before him, and the Bible lay by his side, but at present he had made no progress, for his thoughts were wandering far from pulpit matters. And thus it was they ran:—

“The dream of my youth is over, then, for ever! It was not mere lightness of heart that made her disregard my attachment in former days, for now that her manner is thoughtful and calm, there is no response to the devotion which I have felt for her for years. No doubt she

loves another ; her studious avoidance of my society is not the prompting of a heart that is free. But why should I regret this? Would she have loved me even if her heart had still been her own? The bright and dazzling being, the lovely and high-minded girl, whom I made the idol of my youth, was much too noble a prize for me. My duty now is plain. I believe all men have the dearest hopes of their youth blasted. I never, I fear, can love another as I have worshipped her, but I will do my best to return the affection of that sweet girl whose young, warm heart, I have so unintentionally won. I must tell her all; it will not change her attachment, for it is the truest love she feels. I have seen her eyes sparkle, and her cheek flush, when I have given her only a simple hedge-flower; and, dear Fanny, I can understand it well, for if Eva had but praised the colour of one, it would have been sacred to me from that time. And Fanny is all that a clergyman's wife should be. Yes, we

shall be happy, I do not doubt it, and I will explain everything to her before they leave Glandale !”

And though Edward sighed deeply as he made this resolution, his brow cleared, and he dipped his pen in the ink to commence his labours. He was interrupted by a gentle knock at the door, and Charlotte stood before him.

“ Dear Edward,” she said—there was now no harshness or coldness in her tones—“ mama is busy, and I am dull, or cross, or low-spirited, I don’t know which; may I sit with you awhile?”

“ I am busy too, Charlotte, just now; and unless you have anything particular to say, I would defer the pleasure your society always gives me.”

“ Bah!” said Charlotte, impatiently, “ make no apologies—you do not want me—nobody ever wants me !”

“ You are unjust,” said her brother, “ for you know well that your society has always been dear to me; but I have to write my ser-

mon for to-morrow, and have only a few hours that I can call my own."

"Oh, if it is only your sermon, Edward, never mind it: leave that to me. I will write it for you, as I have often done before. Only give me the text you wish to preach from."

Strange as this statement of the sister may seem, it was true. From having been accustomed to copy her brother's sermons, this singular girl caught his style; and being of a powerful and vigorous mind, made it her own, and occasionally wrote sermons which her brother preached. Edward Dacres admired his sister's talents; himself a man of lofty intellect, with its usual attendants, a love of contemplation, and a sensitiveness of thought, which often made him shrink from the bustle of duties that visited him in task work, Charlotte came at last to be permitted to give her assistance, a thing which always rejoiced her; and this was the cause of her manner of speaking now.

The brother thanked her, but declined to ac-

cept her services, observing, that as he had been so lately appointed rector, he did not wish to trust any portion of his duty to another,

"But you know, Edward, I have more facility in mere composition than yourself; and if you give the heads of what you wish your discourse to consist of, I promise to do no discredit, in the filling up, to the talents of the new rector of Glandale."

"I have full faith in your powers, Charlotte."

"Then do, there's a darling brother; just once more give me my own way. You can't imagine the gratification I always feel in hearing my own composition delivered from the pulpit, and seeing hundreds drinking in the wisdom of my mind, and listening to the whispers of the congregation when they meet in the aisles and the churchyards—'My dear Mrs. Smith, how did you like the sermon to-day?' 'Oh, Mrs. Jones, it was a love of a discourse; truly edifying.' Now, Edward, just fancy how

exciting all this is to me. I assure you I am happy for a whole week after."

"My dear sister," said the brother gravely, "you have indeed reason to be proud of the talents you are gifted with; but would to God I could see that you felt the glorious truths of which you can write so eloquently!"

"Well, well, *cher philosophe*, there is no knowing what your influence may in time effect. At present, pray allow me to be happy in my own way—and tell me, may I write your sermon for you?"

"If you so much wish it, certainly you may," said the young man, whose mind was too much depressed for study; "and indeed I shall not be sorry, for my thoughts are not exactly in the state they ought to be for a labour of this kind."

"A thousand thanks, my darling brother; but tell me what is the matter with your thoughts?"

"I scarcely know, Charlotte. Perhaps I



feel my unworthiness for the responsible situation I hold."

"Edward," replied his sister, bending her dark eyes upon him, as she laid her arm upon his shoulder, "how can you descend to this subterfuge with me? I have read your heart," she continued with excitement, "ay, and know it better than my own. You may at times feel the responsibility of your situation, but it is not that which disturbs you now. No!" and her eyes sparkled angrily as she proceeded, "you are in love with that giggling child, that laughing, senseless daughter of the old man Aylmer. You have turned from the worship of an idol, that even I will acknowledge was worthy of your adoration—you have turned from this, to bow before a toy, a plaything—"

"Stay, Charlotte," said her brother, calmly: "before you proceed further on a subject which you know very little about, pray tell me what advantage I should have derived from continuing to worship one, who never bestowed

even a portion of her most unoccupied thoughts on me."

"What advantage, Edward?" and Charlotte's pale, thin lips curled with the contempt she cared not to conceal. "And shall we turn from the contemplation of the glorious sun, because we gain no advantage from admiring it, nor can pluck it from its radiant home, to bestow our regards on a miserable rushlight that happens to be within our reach?"

"Charlotte, you are too severe. Fanny Aylmer is a sweet and amiable girl, and——"

"And loves you—granted; she does love you, just because there happens to be no one else in the way to love. Forgive me, Edward; I do not wish to pain you, but merely to open your mind to the truth of the case. Your first meeting with her she chose to consider romantic; a week or two's confinement gave her plenty of time to think of it, and when she saw you again, your prepossessing appearance, I dare say, struck her weak imagination—you

know there are some young ladies who have a great fancy for country clergymen—and for a few weeks you have been constantly attending her. She has seen no one else during this period, and she believes herself, and perhaps is for the time, desperately in love. But a month's absence would cure her—ay, less than that,” continued Charlotte; “and for her, Edward, you would turn your mother and sister from their home; a sister, dear, dear Edward,” and her voice unconsciously became more low and soft, “who loves you immeasurably more than a girl like Fanny Aylmer has any conception of—and who has no one but you, in the wide world, to love her in return.”

“My dear sister, all this excitement is quite incomprehensible to me. You ought to be aware that I would never marry any one, who would object to you and our mother continuing with me.”

“It is not that, Edward—it is not that. I scarcely know what I say; but the thought of

your affection being all engrossed by another is agony to me. Fanny Aylmer has many to love her, many tenderly to watch her every look, her every movement. She has friends, Edward—friends!” and Charlotte’s eyes became brighter as she proceeded, and a burning spot rose on both cheeks; “she is not plain, and repulsive, and unloveable—and I, Edward, am all those; and every one turns from me with dislike, if not with abhorrence—all but you, dear, dear brother.” And sobbing bitterly, she flung her arms round his neck, and laid her throbbing head on his shoulder!

Edward returned her embrace, but it was with unusual coldness; and again starting up, she exclaimed: “Ah! even you have ceased to love me. The words I have spoken against your new idol have estranged the small portion of your affections I possessed. If it must be so, then, if you have determined on marrying this—this—let me use your own words—this sweet and amiable girl, I will try to see her

with your eyes, that at least you may restore to me that brotherly love, which my failing to do so has robbed me of." And again she wept passionately.

"Dear Charlotte, I cannot understand this emotion. I do love you as well as ever, and am only angry with you for doubting it."

"No, Edward, you cannot love me, or you would not think of marrying a person I so much dislike."

"But how do you know, Charlotte, that I ever have thought of marrying her, and why should you so much dislike her?" said Edward, warming, in spite of himself, in defence of one, who he knew was far from meriting the strong aversion of his sister.

"No matter, no matter, I see your mind is completely made up; and so, if it be for your happiness, Heaven forbid that I should do or say anything to prevent it. Only, Edward, never ask me to live with you. I dare say poor

mama and I shall find some roof to shelter us when your bride comes to take our place."

"Charlotte, for Heaven's sake cease this mummary," said her brother, now becoming really angry. "What is it you mean, and what would you have me do? You know I would sacrifice my life to ensure your and your mother's happiness; but I really do not see how my marrying, or abstaining from doing so, can affect it."

"Well, well," replied Charlotte, moderating her tone as she saw her brother's patience waning, "do as you will, Edward; I am heartily sorry I ever said anything to vex you, only the idea of your being taken for a fortune-hunter certainly very much annoyed me."

"You are still dealing in mysteries, Charlotte."

"What, you are not aware that Fanny Aylmer will have a fortune of thirty thousand pounds on her wedding-day, provided she marries with her father's consent—which of

course she is certain to do ; for if it pleased her ladyship to fancy herself in love with Tinker Tom, I do believe that doting old father would not oppose it."

"A proof, my dear sister, what a good daughter she must have been to him ; but I confess," continued the young man musing, "this alters my view of the case. I assure you, Charlotte, impossible as you may think it, I never once thought of a fortune with Fanny ; and there are few things which I should feel more than to be called a fortune-hunter—a character I so utterly despise."

A peculiar change of light came into Charlotte's keen dark eyes, as she now said : "I am sure of it—I am sure of it, dear Edward ; and do me the justice to believe that I have no wish but for your happiness in all that I have said."

There was no reply to this ; and Charlotte, as she walked slowly to her room, thus pursued her meditations : "I have not quite triumphed yet,

though Edward may now believe that he is too sensitive and high-minded to incur the imputation of marrying that girl for her money—but I *shall* triumph, for the game is now in my own hands. He does not love her; no, he does not love her, or I would not have interfered. I have not prevented my darling, noble-minded brother's happiness — and hers is no concern of mine. Ay, let her pule and fret, and exchange her joyous, mocking smiles for burning tears; let her waste her young days in mourning a blighted affection, and turn with disgust from the bright sun that *reflects no shadow by her side!* let her weep her very life away; and then, even then, she will have felt no tithe of what I daily, hourly suffer; for friends will be around her, and every sigh she breathes will be echoed back by them; sympathy and affection will be hers, and when she dies, her grave will be watered by many tears. Happy, happy girl! and yet you would take from me the only being, with the exception of my mother—whose love is mere



instinct—that turns not from me with dislike. But I shall foil you, fair lady and put a stumbling-block in your triumphant path; and never, while Charlotte Dacres lives, will she be mocked and insulted in her own family by the exhibition of a happiness that can never be her own.” And she laughed, partly in triumph, and partly in bitterness, at the thought of her lonely destiny; and a laugh so joyless and hollow sounded strangely in those quiet rooms, where naught but the echoing of gentle, heartfelt mirth, had ever before been heard.

The young rector still sat as his sister had left him, with his head resting on his clasped hands, when, about half an hour after he had been left alone, another gentle knock aroused his attention, and again Charlotte softly entered — but this time her errand was quickly told.

“Edward, you must forgive my intruding on you a second time; but as I may not see you again to-night, you had better now tell me the

text you should like for your sermon to-morrow."

"I leave it all to you, Charlotte — I am sure it will be appropriate and well-executed—and now let me be alone."

END OF VOL. I.

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# **THE POOR COUSIN.**



# THE POOR COUSIN:

A NOVEL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

EDITED BY THE AUTHOR OF

"THE SCOTTISH HEIRESS;" "THE YOUNG WIDOW;" "THE YOUNG  
BARONET;" ETC.

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1846.



# THE POOR COUSIN.

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## CHAPTER I.

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“ Through the stained panes the golden sun  
Poured in a dusty beam,  
Like the celestial ladder seen  
By Jacob in his dream.”

---

AND the morrow came, a fair sabbath-day, sunny and beautiful as a good man's heart—a fair, sunny day, although the autumn leaves lay thick upon the ground, and the hedge-flowers were faded, and the meadows had lost their delicate summer green ; a fair, sunny day, and the thatched cottages of Glandale poured forth their usual crowds of bronzed faces and clean holyday gear ; and smiling eyes greeted each

other, and children, with subdued countenances, whispered low, as they exhibited to their companions some new or adapted garment, which their industrious mothers had provided for the blessed sabbath's especial wear ; and they all walked up the wooded ways that led to the parish church. A squire's phaeton, a well-to-do farmer's gig, and a rolling green carriage containing some obscurity of local rank, occasionally glided through the moving groups, among whom many spoke of the old rector who had lived so long among them—of his virtues and his zeal ; and a few more, of the new clergyman, his eloquence, his handsome countenance, gracious smile, and the kindness of his gentlemanlike ways—but by far the greater number discoursed of Miss Eva and the new people, that had taken the Sweetbriar Cottage outside the village.

“In my mind,” said one, “Miss Eva is not half so good-looking as when she lived among us in Glandale ; and for all that some folks say,



that it is such a fine thing to go to Lun'on and see the world, I don't think the dear lady is a bit the better for it—but the worse."

"Ah," replied another, "but her heart is not changed, though her cheeks have lost their colour, and her dear, dark, furrin' eyes are not so merry-lookin' as they were—she is still as kind and good to us as ever. She has more means, belike, now, for she gives gold sovereigns with an open hand. Hough! hough! hough! but they cannot cure my cough. Hough! hough! hough! God's will be done!"

At this moment the party from Sweetbriar Cottage passed up the road on their way to the church.

"And," said an old man, who had joined the group of talkers, "does it not do one's heart good, neighbours, to see such a happy face as that?" pointing to Fanny, who leant on her father's arm. "I could almost fancy myself young again when I look on that kind, sweet smile—heaven bless her for it."

"Ah," interposed an old paralytic woman, who was rapidly proceeding in sidelong bounds, assisted by a single crutch, and who, from ascerbity of feeling, aggravated by disease, had such a love of foreboding evil that she was called the prophetess of Glandale, "let her smile, neighbour, let her smile, but her time is coming; a time," she continued, muttering rather to herself than to those she addressed, for, setting her crutch on the ground she made powerful movements of her blighted body, to keep up a position from which she could look on Fanny's face—"a time is coming when tears will be readier on that face than smiles; it is but fair she should be merry while she can, poor thing;" and continuing this sort of ominous muttering, she reached the church door, when, hobbling up the aisle, she took her seat on one of the pulpit steps, placing her crutch so as to incommode as much as possible all the other elderly women who also had their seats there.

But it was no marvel that the old man's heart

warmed as he looked upon Fanny Aylmer; never had she felt so happy, or appeared so lovely, as on this sabbath day; for the joyousness of her young heart shone in her sweet face, giving it an expression of almost angelic beauty. Gladly had the fond father noticed the unusual animation of his daughter's countenance, although he was far from conjecturing its cause. How should he, single-hearted man, ever guess that merely the thoughts of seeing one, whom a month ago she had never even heard of—but whom now she had been a whole day without seeing—could have the power of bringing such radiant smiles into his pretty, light-hearted Fanny's face. But so it was; and if ever perfect unclouded happiness was permitted to a human being, it was experienced by Fanny Aylmer, as that day she passed over the gray road leading to the ivy-covered church of Glandale.

For not only was she going to see, but to hear him, who had suddenly become to her far dearer than all the world beside. It *was* sudden, but

then all Fanny's feelings were so, but they were not the less enduring on that account. No doubts, no fears, now mingled in her happy thoughts. The last time he had been with her, his manner towards her, she fancied, had been kinder, tenderer than usual ; and every word and look that might be construed into a sign of growing love, had been recalled, as she took her seat by her father's side in the square old pew, and timidly raised her face to contemplate that of the young rector.

All pure and innocent as her reveries were, something like a conscience-stricken thought that this should have been no time or place to indulge in them, cast a passing shadow on her mind ; but Fanny paused not to reflect on the impiety of having her whole soul burning for the creature, when she was come to worship in the house of her Creator. Breathlessly she waited for the first sound of the voice she loved so well, and at length its full, deep tones arose and filled the quiet church. Her cheek flushed, her heart

beat almost audibly ; and, as she ventured a stealthy look on those around, she almost started to see how composed and unconcerned they looked, as though to hear *that* voice was an every-day occurrence. Poor Fanny ! from the look of astonishment that appeared upon her features as she withdrew her eyes to cast them again upon her book, one, who could have guessed the general character of her thoughts, might have imagined that she expected to see an universal blush among the congregation ; but if such was her anticipation, it was altogether disappointed, for with the exception of herself, it seemed as if no one exhibited more emotion at the sound of their young rector's voice, than at that of the gruff and unmelodious one of the aged clerk.

The rich sun of the mellow fall of the waning year shone through the stained glass of the ancient windows, casting long trembling beams here and there, as if it cared but to lighten those parts alone. The old sculptured

monuments—prostrate knights in armour with crossed hands upon their bosoms, and veiled women kneeling in niches over tablets telling of the dead (many of whom were “Dacres of the North”) gave a tone to the aspect of the venerable church, and a character to the solemn music that rose therein, such as is only experienced in an old English church in some secluded part of a knightly county; and still the bright sun shone into the quiet dimness of the ancient building, and the solemn decorum of the spirit of the place had that character of veneration which subdues the most bounding hearts of the sons of men. And Fanny became composed at last, and even endeavoured to abstract her thoughts from everything beyond the holy service in which she was engaged.

And the prayers were ended, and the preacher mounted the oaken stairs of the pulpit: but now another face looked anxious besides Fanny’s, and another heart beat as nervously — but with what different feelings!

These were those of Charlotte Dacres, whose sermon her brother was about to preach. She had arranged so that it should be but just completed in time to carry to church, and Edward had only read the first part of it—and even that hurriedly. But Charlotte wrote a bold, legible hand, and at other times of sensitive mental estrangement, as has been said, he had sometimes trusted entirely to her. The style, too, a brilliant copy of his own, was familiar to him; and, as is frequently the case, he seemed to feel more intently, and to enunciate more eloquently, the language of his pupil than the sermons which he wrote himself.

Fanny had ventured to look up when the hymn preceding the sermon was finished, but she hastily withdrew her eyes, and this time turned pale instead of red, as Edward Dacres pronounced, in a clear, distinct voice, the words of the text: “*Little children, keep yourselves from idols!*”

What feeling was it that made the blood flow

back so rapidly from her before glowing cheek ? It might indeed be somewhat difficult to tell ; yet that little sentence, chosen as she believed by him, destroyed the uncertain fabric of happiness that had that morning been erected in her mind.

It is probable that Edward, as he proceeded, thought of his own youth's wasted idolatry ; for never had he spoken with more eloquence and feeling, than while he now gave expression to his sister's written words ; but Fanny, with increasing shame and wo, applied it all to herself, and believed that he meant thus to convey to her his knowledge of her attachment, and his regret and disapproval of it. It was natural that she should do so. Charlotte Dacres was not likely to miscalculate the powers of any means she chose to employ to effect a desired end—but towards the conclusion, the preacher himself paused more than once, while an expression of deep chagrin and almost shame began to appear suddenly on his countenance.



Perhaps he noticed that pale, sad face beneath him, or it might be even that he feared the warnings couched in such threatening terms, to abstain from fixing our affections on earthly objects, could not fail to strike her whose young, pure heart was given so wholly to himself; and if they did so, was it not an odious and cruel task imposed on him? He felt it deeply—but still he must read on, for there was no loophole through which he might bring that fatal sermon to a hasty conclusion. Charlotte was no bungler in anything that she cared to undertake; and so, in a subdued and altered voice, the latter passages were uttered, and their solemn warning seemed prophetic to all who understood them. Their spirit was that of injunction, according to the text, to keep the heart from earthly idols. “Be it wealth, or fame, or human love,” thus Charlotte had written, and thus Edward read, “that enthrals and fetters the soul, it is equally the worshipping of idols, and the end of all is alike bitterness and vexation of spirit

Wealth, even when attained, fails to produce the delights it promised ; fame is but a shadow, and satisfieth not ; and how seldom is love for an earthly object repaid with an equal degree of devotion to that which it bestows ! Seek not, then, for riches, or this world's applause : and, above all, I warn you not to love the creature more than the Creator ; for the one will prove but a broken reed, while the other is a never-failing staff."

What judgment might not she expect, who, thus regardless of the holy place, regardless of her brother's sacred calling, and regardless of the responsibility of all future consequences, employed the written words of God, and the intelligence which that God had given her, for her own worldly and selfish ends ?

But the service was over at last, and the congregation began to disperse. It had been the custom of the Dacres to join the family of Mr. Aylmer on leaving the church ; but this day they did not do so. The sunshine had long

departed, and the October rain was falling in torrents; and in the confusion occasioned by this unexpected change in the weather, the former family departed unobserved.

"It almost makes one content to be old and body-stricken, when we see the young and healthy with looks of care and sorrow on their fair soft faces," was the muttered observation of the paralytic (speaking to another), as casting her sunken eyes on Fanny Aylmer, she bounded on one crutch past the pale girl, who was standing in the porch waiting for the carriage that was to take her home.

## CHAPTER II.

---

" Silent she sat, a little space apart,  
Brooding o'er thoughts deep treasured in her heart."

---

THE almost sudden death of Maurice Norton created great confusion in the household at Elmcourt, especial as it was followed by the distressing illness of his unhappy sister ; and in this dilemma, Mrs. Aylmer would assuredly have been at her wits' end, had not old Doctor Northcott sent his wife to beg that Miss Norton (who, from a reason hereafter to be explained, had not yet joined her Italian friend) might be removed to their house. The motive

he assigned for this was, that her malady, which appeared to be more of the mind than the body, required, for some time at least, his most attentive care; and although this was certainly the case, it must also be added, that Alice's youth and evident suffering had created a considerable degree of interest in the worthy Doctor's feelings; and seeing the indifference, not to say neglect, with which she was treated by her relations, he had prevailed on his wife to aid him in getting the poor cousin removed to a more friendly atmosphere. And, the first fearful shock over, Alice no longer closed her ears to the voice of kindness. It was this she had so long needed and pined for, and its influence came like balm to her wounded spirit. Not, indeed, that Mrs. Northcott—a good, but rather affected elderly gentlewoman, a fading *precieuse*—was peculiarly adapted for being a consoler, but she went the only way to work which she knew of, and it happened to be the best way. She directed Alice's thoughts to the consolations

and glorious hopes of religion ; and the gentle dove of peace began to come at such times to that stricken soul, and her shrinking conscience to become aroused from its morbid fears, and an earnest desire to grow in her mind that her footsteps should henceforth be guided in the path that leads to virtue and to heaven. And happy would it have been for Alice Norton if she could have ever remained under an influence so blessed.

“ Miss Norton, I have strange news for you,” said the old Doctor, entering, one day, the room that had been appropriated to the invalid, with whom his wife was now sitting. “ You know we professional men are famous for worming out all the secrets of the neighbourhood. However, this won’t be a secret long, I can tell you. But not to keep you in suspense, although you don’t look half so curious about it as a news retailer has a right to expect—what was I saying my dear ? Oh—not to keep you any longer in suspense, for I see you are

dying to hear it ; that is to say, my wife is—eh, Matilda? Well, well, don't turn up your eyes, there's a good soul !”

“Charles! Charles! you are incorrigible. When will you learn to consider people's feelings !” And from the length of time during which the pupils of Mrs. Northcott's eyes were raised to one of the cornices, it might have been imagined that she was imploring it to suggest some remedy for this habit of her husband's, of trifling with what she called her “feelings”—or at least to endow her with patience to endure it.

After continuing some time, vainly waiting for her husband (who was looking at Alice evidently well pleased with her appearance of returning peace of mind) to resume the subject he had commenced, she observed, with an air of resignation, “And now, Charles, will you relieve Miss Norton's very natural curiosity?”

“I will relieve yours, my dear, which I suspect is what you mean, for Miss Norton, I am

sorry to say, expresses no interest in the matter. However, my news is this: Miss Clara Aylmer was married this morning, by special license, at Elmhurst Church, to Sir Marmaduke Digby."

"Well Charles, and to think that you should make all this mystery about a circumstance that has been so long talked of, and expected in the neighbourhood. I declare, I looked for some distressing occurrence, or at least scandalous elopement, by the way in which you announced it."

"Well, my love, and you have been more out than this in your calculations before now; for although there was no Gretna Green in the case, this marriage seems to have been little short of an elopement, for none of the young lady's friends were present at the ceremony; and from what I can gather, her father and mother both particularly wished it delayed till the return of the former. It appears a very mysterious affair altogether, and won't redound



much to the young bride's credit, I'm afraid. But perhaps Miss Norton can throw some light upon it."

"Indeed no," replied Alice, with an endeavour to arouse herself; "I knew so little of my cousins. The only time I ever had any conversation with Clara, was a few days before poor Maurice's death; and then, I remember, she expressed great discontent at her marriage being delayed by her sister's illness, which detained her father at Glandale, and entreated me to avoid getting into bad health, lest that might in any manner interfere with it."

"Upon my word, a very reasonable entreaty," said the Doctor, apparently much amused at the request. And so she was tired of waiting, eh?"

"Charles, when you can make it convenient to allow me to put in a word," exclaimed Mrs. Northcott, "I shall feel obliged to you, as I should like to ask Miss Norton a few questions."

"My dear, you see Miss Norton knows no

more of the matter than ourselves ; and as she looks more delicate than usual this morning, I must not have her worried with talking. No doubt you will hear enough of it in the course of the day."

And the Doctor was right: for in a few hours visitors rapidly poured in, and the one topic with them all was Miss Aylmer's marriage, and subsequent departure for the continent. Every one, of course, gave a different version of it, but at the last came Mrs. Jeremiah Nathan, who still remained an inmate at Elmcourt ; and she, tutored by the " young bride's mother," gave a true and particular account of the transaction that was exciting so much interest in the county circles. And this true and particular account was, that Clara had indeed, with an imprudence both natural and excusable in the young, particularly when in love, at the earnest and repeated importunities of her lover, defied the parental authority, and united herself to the object of

her choice, a week or so before the appointed time.

"This," continued the superannuated sentimentalist, "is the head and front of my young friend's offending; and it would have melted a sterner heart than her fond mother's, to have seen that beautiful and youthful creature kneeling with her husband at her parents' feet, and imploring forgiveness for this first and trifling dereliction of duty!"

"Pray, ma'am, did you *see* her in the kneeling posture?" said an old gentleman, a Mr. William Weatherspoon, the chief retailer of news in the neighbourhood, but who, unlike the generality of his class, prided himself on never repeating the minutest circumstance he had not the highest authority for.

"I did, sir, and it gives me the most heartfelt satisfaction to add, that she rose with her mother's blessing and forgiveness, besides a promise freely given by Mrs. Aylmer to

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THE FIRST CHANCE

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"Pray, what did you nearly a week to write re- ing paper?" and——"

William Watson, "our pardon, ma'am," chimed in spoon, "but you said you had un- authority for this assertion: might I use your name as my informant, ever have occasion to repeat this in-

"fact?" dear Sir, undoubtedly. Jeremiah Nathan, widow Nathan, Esq., of Calcutta,

exert all her influence in moderating the father's displeasure."

"It must have been an affecting sight, ma'am, indeed," persisted the old gentleman ; "and pray what did the bridegroom do or say during this time?"

Why, candidly speaking, my dear sir, he did not appear to so much advantage as Lady Digby."

"You mean," said Doctor Northcott, who had been an amused listener to the foregoing, "that Sir Marmaduke did not go on his knees?"

"Pardon me, Doctor : Sir Marmaduke did go on his knees, when his wife bade him ; but what I meant to express was, that he left her to make all the excuses for their mutual fault ; which I thought, considering he had been the tempter, was rather shabby."

And all present protested loudly against the young baronet's want of gallantry.

"He was always, in my opinion, a very weak

headed young man," said the Doctor's lady, "and just the one to be taken in by the first girl that would be at the trouble to persuade him she was in love with him."

"But Clara Aylmer was the belle of last season," replied Mrs. Nathan, thinking it necessary to resent this indirect attack upon her friend's daughter, "and had no need to 'take in' anybody. I am assured, on undoubted authority, that she had so many offers of marriage in one month, that it took herself and her mother nearly a week to write refusals to them, and——"

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," chimed in Mr. Weatherspoon, "but you said you had undoubted authority for this assertion: might I presume to use your name as my informant, should I ever have occasion to repeat this interesting fact?"

"Undoubtedly, my dear Sir, undoubtedly. Here is my card—Mrs. Jeremiah Nathan, widow of the late Jeremiah Nathan, Esq., of Calcutta,

at your service. And now, my dear Mrs. Northcott, I must wish you good morning, as I left my poor friends, Mrs. Aylmer and her eldest daughter, who is recently returned from a visit to the Comtesse de Villemont, in sad spirits at this loss to their domestic circle. By the by, I was particularly charged to make inquiries concerning Miss Norton, who, her kind cousins hope, you do not find too great a charge." But without waiting for an answer, the widow moved to the door, when suddenly, as if recollecting herself, she turned round, and with a bland smile asked Mr. Weatherspoon, who was the last of Mrs. Northcott's morning visitors, if it would be any accommodation to him to take a seat in her carriage? The offer was joyfully accepted, for he had come some distance to hear the tittle-tattle of the day; and the talking couple drove off triumphantly together.

It was about a week after this that Alice and Mrs. Northcott were one morning sitting together, the latter congratulating her companion



on the daily improvement of her looks, when a carriage drove almost furiously to the door, and in another moment Mr. Aylmer, followed by his youngest daughter, was ushered into the room.

He advanced straight to Alice, and taking her hand, said in a tone of deep feeling, "My dear, dear Miss Norton, I can never forgive myself for the share I have had in your terrible bereavement. Others may tell you, you should rejoice at the release of that afflicted boy; that it is sinful to murmur at Heaven's decree, and all that, which is right enough in its way; but nature, my dear cousin, is nature, and I know how dear he was to you; and Alice," continued he, becoming more excited as he saw his cousin's tears slowly rolling down her pale face, "Alice, we have been all to blame, shamefully, cruelly to blame in the affair. You and your dear brother were neglected from the moment you entered the house. I don't know how it was, but now I remember perfectly, and so I did the

instant I heard the unexpected news of Maurice's death—I don't know how or why it was, but nobody except Stuart, ever showed any kindness or attention to either of you. I suppose we were all too much occupied with each other, but it was unpardonably selfish, and I at least shall never forgive myself for it."

"My dear sir," said Alice, interrupting him, "you have nothing to reproach yourself with, nor indeed have any of my cousins. It was my own fault that I did not receive more kindness and attention, for I would not come among you; and as for Maurice, his sentence had long gone forth, and I feel that he is happier now. This good and kind friend," turning to Mrs. Northcott, "has taught me the duty of submission to a higher power. You, dear sir, and you, Fanny, whom I have ever loved as a sister, must help me to thank her for her kindness and forbearance towards me."

"I am indeed grateful to my worthy friend

Doctor Northcott and his excellent wife, for removing you from a home where you met so little kindness, Alice."

"Do not say that. I doubt not I should have experienced every care had I remained, but they took me away at a time when I was incapable of distinguishing friends from foes, or the most soothing kindness from the cruellest neglect."

"Ay, poor child, Heaven knows you have had sufferings enough, first and last, to drive you distracted, but we will not speak of them now." And then, in answer to Alice's inquiries, he told her he had arrived with Fanny the preceding evening, having started from Glandale the moment the intelligence of the changes in his family reached him—This was all the allusion he made to Clara's marriage.

"And where," continued Alice, "have you left Miss Herbert?"

"Oh, she is still at Glandale with Miss Stanley, an old friend of hers," was the answer.

“ I did not feel justified in hurrying her movements on account of family affairs ; but in a week or so she will return to us, bringing her friend and another young lady with her ; a very superior girl, whose acquaintance we made in Westmoreland—and then,” continued the speaker kindly, “ you must come back to Elm-court, Alice, for we mean to have some gay doings there, I assure you. There is my little Fanny, whose merry countenance used to cheer all who looked upon it, grown pale and sad, and—no, I will not say cross, my own darling, you need not give such a deprecating look ; but you are strangely altered, child. Is she not, Alice ?”

And thus appealed to, Alice, for the first time since they had entered the room, turned her observation particularly to Fanny, and absorbed as she was in all her own unspoken sorrows, she could not fail to notice and lament the change a few weeks had wrought in her young cousin’s appearance.

“ Fanny’s illness must have been indeed

severe," said she, "to have carried off every trace of her gaiety and bloom. I do not think I have heard her voice since she came into the room."

"Papa has had so much to say to you, Alice, that I have had no opportunity at present of expressing my sympathy and concern at your bereavement," replied Fanny, with a sharpness of tone that sounded strange and unnatural from her.

"A fair reproach, Fanny, a very fair reproach. I have, indeed, monopolized all the conversation," said her father, with a forced attempt at gaiety; but there was an unusual glistening in the old man's eye that told, better than words might do, that the reverse of gaiety had struck upon his heart as he listened to the querulous wo-stricken voice of his darling child.

"Well, well, Alice," he continued, "I see you are at present in excellent hands, so I will not press you yet to leave your kind friends; in truth, Elmcourt possesses little enough of at-

traction just now. Mrs. Aylmer is confined to her room from ill-health, Isabella is her constant attendant, and Mrs. Nathan full of mysterious looks, the object or the subject of which seems known only to herself and her maid. So now, being in possession of our *carte du pays*, I am sure you will not be tempted from your agreeable retirement till we have something more piquant to offer you."

Alice made a suitable answer to this, and after an affectionate farewell to her, and repeated thanks to Mrs. Northcott, Mr. Aylmer and Fanny departed.

### CHAPTER III.

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"Ah, quiet dell ! dear cot ! and mount sublime,  
I am constrained to quit you."

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"AFTER all, I cannot avoid feeling very, very sad at the thought of leaving Glandale, perhaps for ever," said Eva Herbert the evening preceding her departure ; " for in spite of the late melancholy events, I have been so tranquil here, that I seem to feel my old happy days returning again."

"But you will be equally happy elsewhere, dear Eva," replied Miss Stanley. "Locality alone has very little to do with our happiness or sorrow."

"But association has much. In wandering about these glens and woods, I am ever recalling those peaceful days when I walked or ran by my poor uncle's side, or strayed alone by the lake, dreaming of the time that was to come—a time of triumph and delight—when I thought that fancy's visions would be more that realized, and the world beyond the hills revealed as a paradise of bliss!"

"And have you then so soon discovered that these were only visions, Eva? or is it but a passing cloud that dims the brightness of the perspective?"

"A cloud it is, though I fear not a passing one. But I am growing egotistical *chère amie*; let us talk of something more interesting."

"Nothing can be more interesting to me than the development of your feelings, Eva. I do not wish to force your confidence, but answer me just this one question. Do you mean to tell me that you have ceased to believe in the possibility of that happiness you used to



picture, or only that you are hopeless of it in your own case?"

"Oh, the latter, surely the latter; for I have for a short season had glimpses of a happiness far, far greater than my wildest imagination ever conceived."

"Oh, then it is all right, Eva, and I may safely predict that you will have more than glimpses of it again. You are formed to love and be beloved. It is not such as you who are doomed to bewail the worship they have given. I would that all in whom I feel interested had as little cause for sorrow of heart as you."

"You do well to remind me of my selfishness, in thinking of my own griefs, when those of my friends cry so loudly for my sympathy. Poor, dear Fanny—I am glad she is gone."

"There is little cause for rejoicing in this. Absent or present, the image of Edward Dacres will ever be before her. In proportion as her spirit was light and joyous before, is it crushed and broken now. She will die, that sweet girl

will die, Eva ; a few months of fretting, and her heart will rest for ever."

" Oh, I hope better things : Fanny is devoted to her father, and for his sake she will struggle with this first disappointment, and in time get over it."

" She will do nothing of the sort : she could not do it even if she were disposed. No, death will be her only refuge."

" Pray do not say so, my dear Miss Stanley, for I feel that her affection for me has been the cause of all. If she had not come to Glandale, she would still have been the merry, thoughtless girl I first knew her, and the delight and comfort of her old father's heart, whereas she will now be a constant source of pain and misery to him. And it was on her alone he depended for happiness, for the other daughters have disappointed him in every way."

" He appeared to feel more anger than sorrow at this recent proof of disobedience in one of them."

"And perhaps, at the moment, he did so, because other events, the death of that poor child, and Fanny's depression of spirits, engrossed his regrets; but I am sure that every fresh instance of unworthiness, or indifference to himself, in any portion of his family, sends a pang to his excellent heart that he is very long in recovering from."

"But you said on Fanny alone was his dependence for happiness. Has the son, then, done anything to forfeit his father's esteem?"

"Oh far, very far from it! I should not have forgotten him, for he is indeed every way calculated to be a blessing and a pride to all of them. But Stuart is very little at home. The uncle who educated him demands all his time and attention, and until his death, Mr. Aylmer will enjoy very little of his son's society."

"Do you know, Eva, I feel a wonderful curiosity to see Stuart Aylmer. It is perhaps because you have spoken less of him than of any of the others."

"I have known less of him" replied Eva, looking on the ground.

"And yet enough, it seems, to form a very favourable estimate of his character—or perhaps that may be derived from your childish recollections," continued Miss Stanley, smiling quietly.

"He will feel deeply this change in his favourite sister," said Eva, speaking more to herself than her companion.

"If he does not come back soon, he will never see it," was the reply. "I felt convinced, as I looked in Fanny's face after that cruel sermon, that her days were numbered: it was the arrow that struck to her heart."

"And yet I cannot think that Edward ever intended it to apply to her. It would be so unlike him, so every way unworthy."

"It matters not what he intended, Eva. He must have been perfectly aware of her love for him; and to say the least of it, the subject, just then, was most unwisely and ungenerously chosen. I cannot help thinking that Charlotte

is at the bottom of it all, but I shall never forgive either of them."

"For my part, I think it was purely accidental."

"I would give much," continued Miss Stanley, without heeding the interruption, "that Mr. Aylmer had not invited that singular girl to return with us to Elmcourt. I have a strange presentiment that unhappiness to more than one will be the result."

"Be it your care, then, *chère gouvernante*, to watch and ward off the threatened evil," answered Eva, endeavouring to give a lighter tone to the conversation.

"Nay, I cannot smile or joke on any subject in which Charlotte Dacres is concerned. Her very name conjures up a host of horrors to my mind; and here I declare she comes, like her prototype, and——"

"Stop, stop, I must not let you finish so uncharitable a sentence, for I intend leaving you to entertain her while I go to beg of

Mrs. Dacres a slipping of one of my uncle's rose trees."

And regardless of Miss Stanley's ill-repressed look of repugnance to the task assigned her, Eva went to put on her bonnet, and then bent her steps slowly and thoughtfully towards the parsonage of Glandale, the home of her former days.

## CHAPTER IV.

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Oh ! there are looks and tones that dart,  
An instant sunshine through the heart,  
As if the soul that minute caught  
Some treasure it through life had sought."

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" I NEVER saw you look so pretty, Fanny," said Alice to her cousin, after having assisted the latter to array herself for the first ball in the neighbourhood, to which the family at Elm-court had been invited. " I predict that you will be the belle of the room."

Fanny's only reply was a faint smile, and then she wondered if the rest were ready.

" Miss Dacres is," said Alice, " for I met her going down to the drawing-room."

"Oh, then I will wait here till I am summoned," was the answer; "but do not stay, dear Alice, for me."

"Yes I will, for I want you to tell me why you appear so much to dislike your new friend Charlotte Dacres."

"It is not dislike I feel towards her, but I confess her society is not very agreeable to me."

"And yet she is kinder, and more attentive to you, than to any one else here."

"Alice," said Fanny suddenly, without heeding this last remark, "how I envy you and Eva being allowed to decline these detestable parties."

"How can you tell that they will be detestable, my pretty cousin? If admiration be productive of enjoyment, I should say they would be the reverse of unpleasant to you."

"Spare your flattery, Alice; it is thrown away upon me; I tell you I do not want admiration. Why does papa persist in making me go?"

"Because he sees that you are in wretched



spirits, Fanny, and hopes that change of scene will do you good."

"But *you* are in wretched spirits too, Alice, and *Eva* is in wretched spirits, and yet no one is urged to act against their inclination but me," said Fanny, petulantly.

"Both Miss Herbert and myself have too good a cause for being depressed," was the mild answer, and our mourning dresses are a sufficient excuse for our declining visiting at present. Besides, Fanny, you are your father's darling, the being he loves best in the world, and it is breaking his heart to see you thus. He will leave no means untried to restore your health and spirits."

Fanny's eyes filled with tears.

At this moment there was a low knock at the door, and Charlotte Dacres entered.

"They are all waiting for you, Miss Aylmer," she said, and her voice restored Fanny's composure on the instant. Hastily taking a shawl from Alice, and bidding her good night, she

drew her arm through Charlotte's, and they descended together.

Eva stood at the drawing-room door, and she whispered to Fanny as they passed, "Come to my room when you return; I shall be so anxious to hear about your first party. You know we were to have made our *débüt* together."

A silent pressure of the hand was the only answer, and in a moment after, the carriage was heard rolling rapidly down the long, silent avenue

Mr. Aylmer, in the hope of amusing Fanny, whose increased dejection excited his most anxious fears, had insisted that his family should accept all the invitations they received from their neighbours, and give entertainments in return. "It matters not," he had said, in answer to his wife's remonstrances, "whether Fanny makes her first appearance in town or country; and if something be not done, and quickly too, her *débüt* will be in the grave." And Mrs. Aylmer, finding objections useless, reluctantly

gave up the point—although she had other reasons than those connected with Fanny for desiring to avoid mixing in the society that surrounded them; and not the least was the fear that Isabella, who she knew would never be prevailed on to remain at home, might be looked coldly upon by any who had heard of her abrupt dismissal from the house of the Comtesse de Villemont, and the cause, which was no less than her public flirtations with that lady's husband, reach her father's ears. What the consequences would be she absolutely trembled to think of, when even in Clara's case he had shown himself so inexorable, refusing ever to hear her letters read, and never on any occasion allowing her name to pass his lips.

But these fears, of course, the bewildered mother confined to her own bosom, only exhorting Isabella by increased circumspection of conduct to atone for her previous folly, to which her dutiful daughter had replied by humming a French air, and walking to the

glass to try the effect of a new wreath of pomegranate blossoms, that was to be worn in her raven hair at the approaching party.

The whole family from Elmcourt, including their guests, had been invited to this assembly; and with the exception of Alice and Eva, all, by Mr. Aylmer's desire, had accepted it. The hosts were Sir Charles and Lady Mostyn—the former a plain, good-humoured, fox-hunting country baronet, with more hospitality than means to support it; the latter—who had been elevated from the rank of nursery-governess to that she now held—a lover of show, a worshipper of fashion, and, what was of far more consequence to her country neighbours, a liberal giver of entertainments whenever it suited Sir Charles with his hunting friends to make Raby-hall their winter quarters. They had been settled in the country little more than a week, when having received and returned the annual visits of their friends and neighbours, Lady Mostyn decided on giv-

ing a party on a scale of unusual magnificence, at which it was rumoured Miss Mostyn would make her first appearance.

The only guests at present staying at Raby-hall were Sir Felix Vaine—of whom mention has before been made—and his cousin Lady Julia Maddy. These were distant relatives of Sir Charles, and immense favourites of his wife. The Aylmers had frequently met Lady Mostyn in London, and the latter renewed their acquaintance with apparent pleasure, declaring she was enchanted at the idea of having such charming neighbours. She congratulated herself that the beautiful heiress of whom she had already heard so much, intended to decline visiting; and fearing no rivalry to her own daughter in the Frenchified and artificial Isabel, or the pale and silent Fanny, she really contemplated with much satisfaction the addition the rich Aylmers from Elmcourt would be to her parties, and graciously entreated that all their guests, male and female, would ho-

nour Raby-hall with their presence on this occasion. And sooth to say, none were unwilling to indulge her. To our old friend Mrs. Nathan, the prospect of a party of any sort was always a source of unfeigned delight; and besides, she had now her own private reasons, probably connected with those mysterious signs which had been observed passing between herself and maid, for rejoicing in the invitation. Miss Stanley was always glad of an opportunity of following her favourite pursuit, namely, the study of character and the development of human feelings (a taste, which perhaps some narrow-minded people might say, was but a foreshadowing of that stronger propensity for gossip and scandal that is almost inseparable from the advance of female age in a single state); and believing she now knew every turn of those of the family with whom she was domesticated, was not sorry to have a chance, by mixing with their neighbours, of a little additional employment for her ever active

mind. Charlotte Dacres, too, it must be inferred, had *her* reasons for anticipating the party with satisfaction, for never had she been known before to linger more than ten minutes at her looking-glass ; but on this evening, the duties of her toilet had occupied at least three-quarters of an hour ; and Miss Stanley, who had entered her room, at Mrs. Aylmer's request, to hasten her movements, just as she was putting the last pin in her white dress, noticed with surprise that there was a light in Charlotte's eyes that indicated neither envy, hatred, malice, nor uncharitableness. What it meant, she firmly resolved before long to discover ; but then she only said : " Ah, Miss Dacres, I see you too intend entering the lists against this universal lady-killer. Poor Sir Felix ! he must be more than mortal if he withstand the hundred darts from the two hundred bright eyes that are preparing for him to-night."

Charlotte, who was perfectly aware both of

her own lack of attractions, and of Miss Stanley's unusually clear perception of it, knew that, as far at least as she was concerned, this speech was ironical ; and therefore it was that without replying to it, she quietly continued her occupation at the mirror, and when that was completed, left the room without bestowing the smallest notice on her facetious companion.

It happened, in entering the well-lighted drawing-room of Lady Mostyn, that these discordant spirits walked side by side ; and as they passed (on their way to the mistress of the house) a group of young people, among whom a very tall and handsome man was conspicuous, Miss Stanley turned to her neighbour for the purpose of making some casual remark, and again she was puzzled more than ever on observing the usually pale and sallow countenance of Charlotte Dacres, suffused with a most vivid blush.

Lady Mostyn received the new comers with



much *empressement*, introduced them to her husband's relative, the Lady Julia Maddy (a thin, elegant girl, just a *little blasé*), and regretted her daughter's absence, who she said was unable to assist her in welcoming their friends, on account of the illness of little Pauline, her ladyship's youngest child. "Ginevra," she continued, smiling and bowing to all the party alternately, "poor Ginevra has been somewhat spoiled, and she takes advantage of this by asserting a will of her own in everything, and nothing could persuade the obstinate child to leave her sister, who is devotedly attached to her."

This communication had more than enough of truth in it to satisfy the exceedingly convenient conscience of Lady Mostyn, inasmuch as the young lady in question had earnestly entreated to be allowed to stay with her suffering little playfellow, instead of making her *débüt* among the county fashionables below; but the smiling parent might as well have added—for

Lady Julia added it for her, to all who cared to hear it—that these entreaties of the affectionate girl might as well have been spoken to the winds, had not “that wretch of a milliner” disappointed them, in neglecting to send the elegant ball dress that was to adorn the pretty person of the young heiress of Raby-hall.

The old and familiar adage of the “ill wind,” however, held good on this occasion, for in the absence of Ginevra Mostyn, Fanny Aylmer was decidedly the belle of the room, and if, as Alice had said, admiration could give pleasure, she ought to have been happiest among the happy that night ; that she was not so, but, on the contrary, one of the least contented of all that shining crowd, will not surprise the reader who has been allowed the privilege of penetrating the secrets of her young but burdened heart.

It is a known fact that many of the fair spinsters present on the evening in question,

actually believed, and said to each other, that the youngest Miss Aylmer must be labouring under a partial alienation of intellect, when they observed that she had declined the honour of waltzing with the bewitching Sir Felix, and even seemed unconscions or ungrateful under his flattering notice; a tithe of which they would, one and all, have sacrificed much to obtain. And Sir Felix was doubtless pretty well convinced of this remarkable fact, and therefore found increased excitement in bestowing his attentions on one whose smiles it might cost him a little pleasing trouble to win. But if he fancied that Fanny Aylmer, in return for even the most laborious pains, would that night at least, swell the number of his victims, he was most assuredly mistaken; and some glimmering of this startling truth seemed to flash across his mind towards the end of the evening, for he suddenly turned, as if fatigued with wasting his gallantry and wit on one so insensible, and directed all his attention to Fanny's neighbour, with a hope

perhaps, of piquing the cold beauty into more graciousness. It mattered not to him that the person he now chose to honour had few outward graces to attract the eye ; Sir Felix, even in his most humble moments, thought far more of himself than of any other created being, however lovely or fascinating they might be, and therefore it was not likely that now, when he sought only to find a balm for his wounded pride, that he should bestow a too critical attention on the insignificant instrument it was his pleasure to employ. It mattered not to Sir Felix, that the one whom chance had placed next to him when he turned from Fanny Aylmer, was the plainest and least noticed of all that glittering throng. It was Charlotte Dacres who now listened, and with no unwilling ear, to his honied words.

They were nothing to him who spoke them, forgotten almost ere they had passed his lips ; nothing—ay, less than nothing, for had they not been whispered before to more fair ones

than he might count ? had not the same smile, so full of studied softness, been practised years ago, till it had become the most easy expression of his handsome countenance ? did he not know by rote every delicate compliment that this night he uttered ? Ay, well indeed he knew all this, if he knew nought besides ; and so they were nothing to him, but to *her*—to the unloved, unflattered, unfriended Charlotte Dacres, those trifling words were destiny !

Poor Charlotte, with all her art and cunning, all her powerful depth of thought, and daring investigation of the mysteries of existence, was a very child in the world's knowledge : and so she would have felt, had it been permitted for her spirit to linger in Lady Mostyn's drawing-room, after she herself had departed.

“ Now tell me, I pray thee, cousin mine,” said Lady Julia Maddy, advancing to Sir Felix as he returned from escorting the Aylmer party to their carriage, “ if it is over our eyes or yours that some envious magician has cast a

veil, making us mistake beauty for deformity, or deformity for transcendent loveliness? In plainer terms, what invisible charm has your penetration discovered in this new Dulcinea to whom all your devoirs have been paid?"

"Ay, do tell us, Vaine," said a young sailor, the only son of Dr. Northcott, and who was just arrived in England; "what the plague could you see in that plain-looking girl, to rivet your attentions all the evening?"

"Good friends," replied Sir Felix, slightly yawning, as he threw himself on the nearest *fauteuil*, "don't trouble yourselves or me with any more questions; for I give you my honour, I never looked in the poor thing's face, and shouldn't know her from Jezebel or Cleopatra, if I met her to-morrow.—That was a pretty little thing, though, who sat next to her, and wouldn't waltz."

## CHAPTER V.

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“ Not his the form, not his the eye,  
That youthful maidens wont to fly.”

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“ DRAW your chair closer to the fire, Fanny, and when you are quite warm and comfortable, you shall begin your description of the party and Sir Felix Vaine, all about which and whom, I assure you, I am dying to hear,” said Eva, throwing her favourite Wordsworth, which she had been reading the long hours through, on an adjoining table, and welcoming her friend to the cosy fireside of the luxuriously furnished little apartment, which the heiress called her own.

"How kind of you, Eva, to sit up for me.— I am very, very tired myself, and I think we had better defer our gossip till to-morrow."

"Not for the world. I cannot sleep till I have heard all you have to relate."

"Well, that is soon told," said the yawning débutante. "Everything was as heavy and stupid as it could possibly be."

"Do you include Sir Felix among the dead-weights?"

"I not only include, but I place him at the head of the list."

"But is he not as handsome as people say, Fanny?"

"Oh, yes, I believe he is good-looking enough. Charlotte Dacres can tell you more about him, for they conversed a long time, apparently mutually pleased with each other. I only hope, with all my heart, it may end in matrimony."

"You do not like Charlotte, Fanny?"

After a short pause, Fanny answered slowly,



“ No, Eva, I do not.”

“ But you love her brother ? ”

There was another and a longer pause, but at last the tremulous answer came—

“ Yes, Eva, I do ; ” and then, with a blushing face, Fanny poured forth, in broken accents, the long-concealed history of her love and disappointment ; and as she proceeded tears fell slowly, then faster, until at last the choking sobs showed how much deep feeling was pent up in the warm, pure heart of this bright and gentle girl. These emotions somewhat hushed, Eva exhorted her, for her father’s sake, to exert herself to shake off such extreme despondency, or at least try to appear less miserable than she had hitherto done.

“ Eva, my own friend,” replied Fanny, “ do not think so badly of me as to suppose that I have yielded to this selfish and absorbing grief without a struggle. Heaven only knows how I have prayed for strength to bear it better, and how gladly I would still lay down

my miserable life to secure my dear father's happiness, which I know my pining has much disturbed; but I cannot rouse myself—indeed, Eva, I cannot; at least all my efforts hitherto to seem as happy as I once was, have failed. Perhaps now that I have some one to speak to about it—about him, I mean—it may be different. This hope has long made me wish for courage to tell you everything—and you will not betray me?”

“Not for all the world, Fanny! but you did wrong to keep your secret so long from me.”

Again Fanny's pale cheek crimsoned as she replied, “I was ashamed, Eva; cannot you understand this?”

“Indeed I can; but now that the ice is broken, you must not fear to tell me all your thoughts and feelings. I am sure it will be a relief to you.”

“And you will never breathe a word against him to me, Eva?”

“Certainly not, Fanny, for I am far from

thinking he deserves it ; and I have great hopes that all will yet go right."

"Do you really think so, dearest Eva?" said Fanny, her heavy, tearful eyes once more lighting up with hope and gladness. "Oh, Eva, how very, very thankful I am that I had the courage to tell you. And you believe," she continued, smiling through her lingering tears, "that he may yet love me even as I love him? Is not that what you mean, Eva?"

Now Eva did not exactly mean this, because, somehow or other, Miss Stanley, from an imperturbable though quiet confidence in herself, had a wonderful power of convincing people that her opinions were always the correct ones; and so she had greatly persuaded her former pupil, that the young rector would never love again as he had once done; and Eva, knowing that Fanny loved to the whole extent of her nature, would have found this question very perplexing, had her friend waited for an answer, which she did not do; but in the re-

action of feeling produced by having disclosed her long-concealed and therefore magnified sorrows, went on weaving imaginary visions of happiness, that one short hour ago she believed would never enter her mind again.

At length, wearied with talking and excitement, and noticing too, that her companion looked pale and sleepy, she proposed their retiring to rest, which Eva, in spite of all her friendship for Fanny and interest in her loves and griefs, was not sorry to do. .

She had sat up and invited Fanny to her room, purposely to induce this confession, which Miss Stanley, who still relaxed not in her *surveillance*, had suggested as the only relief which the object of their anxiety now could hope for. Eva was more sanguine as to the happy ending of the affair, and could not avoid communicating her ideas on the subject to the depressed débutante; nor did she regret having done so, when the following morning, at a much earlier hour than usual,

she was surprised by seeing Fanny bending over her bed, with a look of greater cheerfulness on her countenance than it had worn since that unhappy Sunday at Glandale. It is true the excitement of the previous night had entirely passed away, but then there remained less of the melancholy aspect which had preceded *that*; and Eva hoped that the contentment of her naturally sunny mind was at length returning.

Fanny appeared much confused when she first perceived her companion's eyes bent upon her, but as no allusion was made to the last night's conversation and confessions, she quickly recovered her composure, and proposed to Eva that they should take a walk before the rest of the family were stirring.

"I see," she continued, "you are astonished at this whim of mine, but the fact is I am anxious to surprise papa by appearing at breakfast with a bloom on my cheeks; and being at present rather jaded from having had but

little sleep, I wish to try the efficacy of the morning air. It is very early, indeed the sun has but just risen, so we shall not meet anybody, and we will take a long walk."

Eva would willingly have rested a little longer, but desirous of obliging Fanny, she made no objection; and in half an hour, the two friends were wandering over the hills and far away.

Although near the end of autumn, the morning was mild and delightful. The sky was still beaming with the glory of the lately-risen sun, and the breezy air was filled with the clamorous twittering of the forest birds, with, now and then, the sweet whistle of the black-bird, and the flute-like note of the thrush amongst them, reminding the listener that sweet summer had not long been gone; and the rooks that lived among the tops of the noble elms, from which the manor-house took its name, were now cawing in the morning air; while across the distance of the russet planta-

tions on the hills, came the note of the wood-pigeon mourning plaintively among the falling leaves.

Higher and higher rose the unclouded sun, and still the two girls walked on regardless of distance or fatigue, for their spirits rose with it, catching from the joyousness of nature that rapturous mood, when the mere consciousness of existence is almost bliss; they both had sorrows, heart sorrows to endure, which often robbed their soft cheeks of their bloom, and brought bitter tears into their sparkling eyes; but all these were unthought of now, under the buoyant influence of the pure atmosphere of that autumn morning.

“I have been thinking, Eva,” said Fanny at length, after a silence of many minutes, “I have been thinking how very sinful I have been in murmuring as I have done against the will of heaven, and believing that because one thing I passionately longed for was denied me, earth had no other blessing. Oh, it has many, Eva!

it is a bright and beautiful world, and surely we might be happy in it, if we would."

"I do not quite think, Fanny, that our happiness is in our own keeping, although undoubtedly we have the power of making our destiny better or worse by the way in which we bear it. But I do agree with you that it is a bright and beautiful world, and has far more sources of pleasure than we seek for. How little, for instance, do any of the sleepers we have left, think of the delights we are at present enjoying. I hope, Fanny, I look as blooming as you do?"

"I cannot see myself, Eva, to compare our looks, but I never thought you so perfectly beautiful before—you have been too pale lately."

"Upon my word, all this waste of beauty is a sad pity, Fanny ; so suppose we think of returning, and astonish the party at breakfast with our complexions and our appetites."

"Yes, if you are tired ; but I have enjoyed



s walk so very much, that I feel no wish to  
arten it."

"Well, then, we will sit and rest on this  
k, for I confess I am rather tired, not being  
ustomed to these early rambles ; but hark !  
s not that a whistle ?"

Fanny had not heard it.

"See," continued Eva, bending forward to  
k into the valley below them whence the  
nd had come, "I almost expected a Damon  
fair Phillis, but it is only a couple of large  
nds—I hope they are not coming this way.  
! there is a Damon after all, but he does  
appear very pastoral."

Fanny looked in the direction to which Eva  
nted, then suddenly drew back, exclaiming  
tone of chagrin, "It is Sir Felix Vaine !"  
Oh, let us get out of his way then, as  
ckly as possible. A rencontre just now  
ld be rather unpleasant, as of course he  
ld speak to you."

Fanny rose instantly to follow this sugges-

tion, but it was too late ; Sir Felix, probably hearing youthful voices above him, had ascended the steep bank where they sat more rapidly than the two girls had thought possible, and before they had time even to draw down their veils, stood hat in hand, bowing to Fanny, and expressing his surprise that, after the fatigues of the preceding evening, she should be such an early riser. Fanny answered him with so much reserve, that he had no excuse for continuing the conversation, and, though with evident reluctance, was obliged to take his departure, but not before he had cast a surprised and admiring glance at Eva, who he at once concluded was the far-famed Indian heiress ; and struck with her great beauty—he also remembered her princely fortune—and new plans and resolutions were formed by him, as he walked towards Raby-hall, in deep and exciting thought.

The two girls spoke much of the handsome baronet on their way home, particularly Eva,

who acknowledged his striking and prepossessing appearance. Fanny said less about him, but she was content to agree with her companion.

"I have changed my plans, Ju," said Sir Felix to his cousin, when they met that morning in the breakfast-room, before their hostess made her appearance. "I intend remaining here another fortnight, so be good enough to write and tell your mother not to expect us for that time. Of course you will not think of leaving Derbyshire before me?"

"Might I presume to inquire your motives for this caprice, Sir Felix, after having positively declined Lady Mostyn's very pressing invitation to prolong your stay?"

"You may presume to do anything, fair Julia, unless it be to ask me to marry you, which upon my honour I couldn't do—By the bye, do tell me if this confounded wind has taken the curl out of my whiskers. I have been positively so struck by a vision of beauty that came across

me this morning, that I forgot to look in the glass on my return."

"It is the first time, then," said Lady Julia, angrily, "that Sir Felix Vaine has ever been guilty of the humility of thinking of any beauty before his own."

"You are pleased to be severe, this morning, pretty coz.; a too-agreeable dream, perhaps has made the reality of your condition appear more than usually dreary—" and, walking to the window, Sir Felix began humming

"Nobody coming to marry me,  
Nobody coming to woo!"

while Lady Julia bit her lips with anger; but unable to resent, she determined not to notice her cousin's impertinence, and therefore, in as calm a voice as she could command, repeated her question as to the cause of his sudden change of plans.

"Since you are bent upon becoming my confidante, Julia, I will do my best to gratify your curiosity. The fact is, I have seen this

beautiful Miss Herbert, the old nabob's heiress, and, and—in short, not to weary your ladyship with details, it is my intention to marry her.”

Lady Julia betrayed no vulgar astonishment at this communication; on the contrary, she only said, “Is the lady apprised of your flattering intentions, Sir Felix?”

“Why, not exactly, inasmuch as I have not yet had the honour of an introduction to her, nor do I precisely see how it is to be managed, since she does not appear in society at present. You perhaps can assist me, by becoming very intimate with these Aylmers, where of course you will see Miss Herbert, and then you can give her a hint of my sentiments—after which the coast will be clear.”

“But supposing the lady should have some previous attachment?” suggested his cousin.

Sir Felix's only reply to this was a short, quiet laugh, while he sauntered slowly to the shining mirror at the other end of the room, and passed his fingers carelessly through his rich hair, and coaxed his well-trained whiskers

into a more graceful curl ; and then he turned to his cousin as if nothing had been said.

“I understand you,” replied Lady Julia, “but it may chance that everybody will not look at Sir Felix Vaine with his own too partial eyes.”

“I have small fear on that account, gentle coz., small fear that a young, inexperienced country damsel, will show less taste than the courtly and ultra-fashionable Lady Julia Maddy.”

This affectionate dialogue was here opportunely ended, by the entrance of Lady Mostyn, to whom Sir Felix, with many well-timed compliments, communicated his intention of accepting her ladyship’s invitation to prolong his visit ; at which the lady expressed, in as many more compliments, all the satisfaction and delight such a compliance gave her—and then Sir Felix buttered his toast and cracked his egg, without paying the smallest attention to the frowns that had gathered on the fair brow of his dear cousin Ju.



In the meantime, Eva and Fanny had arrived at home, and found all the family, with the exception of Miss Dacres, assembled at the breakfast table. Their early ramble had been discovered, and so they said nothing about it; and everybody seemed too much occupied with themselves, to remark the unusual bloom of the two young beauties. On entering the room, after changing their walking dresses, they found that the whole of the party were conversing about the guests of Lady Mostyn, and Fanny was immediately appealed to by her mother to support her in her assertion, that Sir Felix was the handsomest and most accomplished man in Derbyshire.

"Oh, dear mama," was the answer, "if I hear much more about that man, I shall begin to think him the plainest and most disagreeable, not only in Derbyshire, but in the whole world."

"Fanny, you speak like a foolish child—I

am sure he was vastly polite to you," said Mrs. Aylmer angrily.

"And to Miss Dacres, too, mama," added Isabel, spitefully.

"Of course, that showed his perfect good-breeding. He knew she was our guest. Indeed I have no hesitation in saying, as I believe there are none but friends here, that Sir Felix Vaine's attentions to Fanny were very marked indeed; and more than one person noticed it." Then, turning to her unconscious daughter, Mrs. Aylmer continued, "Fanny, I have ordered the carriage at three, when I shall expect you to be in readiness with your sister to accompany me on a call to Lady Mostyn."

"I am sorry," began Mr. Aylmer, looking at Fanny but speaking to his wife, "to destroy the castle which I see you have built since last night; but it is generally understood that Sir Felix Vaine is engaged to his cousin, Lady Julia Maddy."

Mrs Aylmer only smiled benignly, as she



ced to Mrs. Nathan, who nothing loth to  
her own voice, answered with great ala-  
for her friend. "My dear sir," said the  
ow, "I must entreat your pardon for tell-  
you that your information in this matter  
wholly incorrect. I happen to know the  
le story, through an unquestionable chan-  
' Here the widow paused, and affected to  
confused, for she expected to be asked  
e about this unquestionable channel; but a  
silence reigning, she continued, "My  
rmant's authority I cannot doubt, and what  
communicated, I might almost say in confi-  
ce to me, was this—"

Just listen now," said Mrs. Aylmer, bridling  
tle.

Lady Julia Maddy," continued the widow,  
you know, the only unmarried daughter of  
dowager Countess of Meltonville, the aunt  
sir Felix Vaine. While quite a child, she  
d with an old grandfather, who being almost  
is dotage, and having nothing else to love,

became very much attached to her. As she grew up, she also visited him occasionally, and in these visits she was sometimes accompanied, and often met by Sir Felix Vaine, who stood in the same degree of relationship to the old man as herself, and had probably some hopes of succeeding to his property. At length the grandfather died, and the will contained certain unexpected clauses. The whole of his property he left to his grandson Felix, on one condition, which was that of marrying his cousin Julia, whose attachment, it hinted, he had discovered ; but not it would seem being equally certain of Sir Felix's reciprocating the lady's sentiments, the will further decreed that in the case of this condition being refused, the property should devolve to a distant relative, for whom the old man knew that his grandson had a mortal hatred. And," continued the speaker, glancing triumphantly towards her rather inattentive host, " the conditions were refused."

Well," said Mr. Aylmer, looking up for the first time, "and what, ma'am, were the consequences?"

Just what the will had determined them to be, sir; the distant relation got the money, Felix kept his liberty, and the lady was obliged to keep hers—but that she was, and is still attached to him, I believe no one pretends to doubt."

They must now stand in a somewhat perplexing relation to each other?"

Not the least in the world; they are both high-bred for that. Their relation to each other is indeed curious and mysterious, and is one of those strange things one witnesses in the highest English circles alone. Lady Julia and Sir Felix are nearly always seen in society together; they are no great friends, to judge from their general manner to each other, yet they evidently have mutual confidences which are like friendship. Lady Julia's attachment to him has long been well known; yet as

her mother is his aunt, and the daughter has no brother, Sir Felix takes something of this place, although the love passages in regard to the will, make that position imperfect. Altogether, it is one of those curious relations peculiar to English society, in which the *haut ton* of the parties shuts the lips of scandal; although it certainly," continued Mrs. Nathan, nodding her head sagaciously, "has some qualities in its composition difficult to explain. Now you know their story, my dear sir, and after all, it is not a secret one."

"Something of this I now remember to have heard," said Mr. Aylmer rising, as if he had only been waiting for the conclusion of Mrs. Nathan's narrative, to leave the room; which he now did, once more looking inquiringly at Fanny, as he closed the door after him.

His departure was followed by the entrance of Charlotte Dacres, and a servant with the letter-bag. Most of the party were immediately too much interested in examining the

contents of the latter, to bestow more than a polite salutation on the former; but Miss Stanley not expecting, or not caring for letters, noticed that the same look which had so excited her curiosity the preceding evening, now dwelt on the features of Charlotte in a more marked and decided degree. Their cold, contemptuous expression was replaced by a kind of timid softness, that, however, suited their naturally harsh outline, even less than the sterner one they had hitherto worn. But the conclusion Miss Stanley was about to draw from all this, was suddenly checked by an exclamation from Mrs. Aylmer. "Children!" she cried, addressing Isabella and Fanny, "your poor uncle is dead! and Stuart, who is his heir, will be here in a few days."

Both Eva and Alice rose and left the room, probably because the intelligence concerned not them. The latter, however, had a letter of her own to read, and they both hastened to their separate apartments.

## CHAPTER VI.

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——“ And what's her history ?”

“ A blank, my lord.”

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THE letter which Alice, on reaching her room, opened and read, was as follows:—

“ *Prior's-grove, Devon*

“ *28th October, 18*

“ DEAREST FRIEND,

If you have not quite forgotten one who loved you very dearly, come to me as soon as this reaches you. I am alone, and ill, and wretched.

“ N



“ P.S. If you think Maurice can travel so far, bring the dear child too, and every comfort shall be provided for him.”

The last letter, prior to the above, which Alice had received from the Signora Solari, was that which first mentioned her intention of coming to England. Alice had written to her repeatedly since, and had much wondered at never getting any answer. It was now plain that these letters had not been received, since Nina believed Maurice to be still alive ; and the mystery which had always seemed to surround the beautiful and lonely widow was increased. Alice, however, would gladly have awaited its unravelling one short week longer. It was so natural she should wish to see her kind cousin, after such an absence—ay! so natural too, that she should wish to see him, now that no impediment to loving him, and welcoming his love, existed. So many things might happen before she returned ; the dark-eyed and grace-

ful Eva, now in her nineteenth year, and more richly than ever endowed with the increased loveliness of youthful womanhood, would be always near him—and Alice had had leisure lately to discover *how* graceful and lovely her rival was; and her heart ached at the thought of these things. But then came the reflection that Stuart Aylmer was not one lightly to change his devotion, so the sweet trustfulness of Alice's gentle nature asserted its empire in her warm, pure breast, and she determined to go at once to her friend.

Mr. Aylmer, to whom she first communicated this intention, vainly tried to combat it. He had a rooted prejudice against all foreigners, and could not be made to perceive the necessity for a "young and delicate girl, just recovering from a severe illness, taking a journey of some hundred miles to gratify the whim of a flighty widow, who probably had half-a-dozen husbands in different parts of the world."



Alice gently reminded him of the more than ordinary kindness she had ever received from him to whom she was now summoned ; and the sturdy man was silenced, if not convinced. He however insisted on taking care of her to the nearest town to the village from which her letter was dated ; and Alice, although doubting him she considered Margaret her father's nurse, who still continued with her, for sufficient protection, gratefully accepted this arrangement.

Mrs. Aylmer secretly rejoiced at her young cousin's departure, and did all in her power to expedite it. The rest of the family were indifferent regarding it, for Alice was too quiet and reserved in her general deportment to make many warm friends, and with the exception of her father, whose adieux to her cousin were tender and kind, Alice parted from the family not as one who is leaving a home.

The journey was quickly made—four post-chaises, with now and then helps from partially-

formed railways, soon brought the travellers to the Devonshire post-town at which Mr. Alymer and his companion had to part. And it was with renewed reluctance that he did so, for not all his cousin's representations had succeeded in convincing him that any foreigner could be a suitable friend or companion to a girl so young and inexperienced as Alice; but in spite of his prejudices, he was forced to acknowledge that under the present circumstances, any other line of conduct than that which she had adopted might have been considered ungrateful and unchristianlike; and so with many and repeated expressions of kindness and affection, he at length took his leave.

And in a few hours more, Alice Norton found herself once again in the presence of Nina Solari.

It was not much more than half-a-year since they had parted, but a marked and striking change had been wrought in both. Nina was

still lovely, but her dark eyes had the deep light which great excitement leaves; the soft cheek was very pale, and though the beautiful mouth retained its delicate chiselling, and the graceful figure had not lost any portion of its natural dignity; there was something in her whole appearance drooping in aspect, though not in mien; and something in the vivid changes of the countenance which showed that the elements of life were burning up—while Alice's pale beauty had expanded under the influence of returning peace and the indulgence of long-suppressed hopes, into a perfection of loveliness that it had scarcely given promise of; and it would be difficult to say which was the more astonished at looking on the other.

Nina was the first to speak, after the cordial embrace had been given.

“ You are surprised, dearest Alice, to see me in this quiet cottage in a sequestered English village, instead of at my own beautiful

home in Italy, where we have spent such pleasant hours together; but you will soon cease to wonder that I should prefer to die in England, than in any other part of the wide world. For, Alice, the elasticity of life has passed from me, and already the shadow of the gates of death are slowly darkening my path. But I am egotistical already, with much to welcome half unsaid; the unhappy, Alice, as always so. Your mourning dress, *carina*, surely it is not for poor Maurice?"

And in reply, Alice told her friend all that had happened since they parted, all but the one secret of her inmost heart, which had never yet been breathed to mortal ear; of this she spoke no word, and if Nina Solari guessed by the sudden flush that once or twice welled and came on her companion's countenance, by the deeper light of the large dark pupils, by her pure blue eyes, that other feelings than those talked of, had been aroused in the young girl's soul, she asked no questions, she made no comment now.

And for hours the two friends so joyed in each other's love-greetings, and in the renewed communion of that affection which to the wealthy widow and the poor cousin was not only equally common, but equally esteemed a blessing of their lots—that nothing besides was spoken of; but when the almost untasted but, more “elegant,” (to use such a delicate word) dinner than seemed in accordance with cottage walls was over, and the wan light of the departed sun was stealing into the small room, on the table of which crystal and gold showed that the Signora was accompanied by some of her household even in this profoundly obscure retreat, Nina, after Alice's renewed request to know the cause of that change which seemed to have stricken her beautiful friend to the dust, no longer hesitated, and with growing excitement as she proceeded, until at times her soft rich voice had the thrilling music of passionate wo, the pale Italian thus shortly told the history of her lot:—

“ I will not fatigue you, *carina*, by giving you such an account of what you desire to know, as my heart would dictate, but simply tell you those events which have led to my present situation, and are leading me to the grave. I think I must have told you that both my parents died when I was a child, and that the guardian they selected for me eventually became my husband ; but before this, I was placed in one of those expensive convents in which Italian girls of rank and fortune are usually taught the accomplishments so valued among us. It was there that I became acquainted with Florence Savile, a young English lady about my own age, whose family were travelling on the continent, and whom delicate health had obliged to remain in the convent during their absence. We became friends, Alice, dear and devoted friends, and she first taught me to love the land of freedom and domestic happiness—the land of her birth and pride. Well, we parted at length, I to

married to a man I scarcely knew, and Florence to return with her family to the country she loved so well, and where soon after she became the loved and loving wife of one whom her heart had chosen. I have often told you that my own married life was far from being unhappy; my husband, though many years my senior, was neither jealous nor morose; he was kind and attentive to me, and it is probable that in time I should have learned to love him too, but death separated us after an union of six months, and at the age of nineteen I found myself mistress not only of my own actions, but of a magnificent fortune and estate.

“For one year after this event, I lived with my husband’s aunt in the strictest retirement, maintaining all the while a constant correspondence with Florence. At the end of that time I determined to accept her oft-repeated invitation to visit her in England, and accompanied by my good-natured and complaisant relative,



I left Naples for Paris, which city I had so much curiosity to see: and here it was that a new destiny—that of an occupied heart—changed the character of my life.

“We children of the south, Alice, require not years or months to form a lasting attachment, or at least to receive those impressions which eventually lead to this; and a stranger of what country I knew not, that I first saw one of the great churches on a festival day, afterwards frequently met at public places, exercised an influence over my feelings which I could neither check nor govern.—The passion of my heart was more speedily confirmed by perceiving that it was responded to by the object; and that slight and secret communications of affection which can be read in mutual glances, however casual and reserved, increased the tumult of my heart, until the deepest sentiments of my soul became aroused to a passionate devotion, which seemed to have changed my nature.



“I would have fain stayed much longer than I did in Paris, for I had youth, wealth, and beauty; but my engagement to visit Florence, and the disappearance of the object of my passion from public places, made me resume my journey to England, with a heart and mind entirely occupied with the remembrance of the stranger whose influence over me lost nothing by this mutual desertion of each other. It was therefore that when Florence, whom I found the very type of English domestic happiness, talked to me, as she loved to do, of her handsome and noble brother Sidney, I listened coldly and without interest (knowing how she had long planned that this brother and I should love each other) feeling that none but he whose image now filled my heart could ever have a place in my affections.

“You will marvel, Alice, at enthusiasm like this; but though you may not understand, believe it not the less. As truly as you see me now a miserable wreck of all I once was, so truly

did those feelings I tell you of, exist. Judge then if such at that time was their strength, what they must have been when I discovered—and oh! the happiness of that moment might have compensated for an age of wretchedness—when I discovered in the brother of Florence the stranger, who as a stranger, I had loved. He had been for some years abroad, and had only then (about a year after my arrival in England) returned to take possession of his estate, which hitherto his mother had managed. And that mother, Alice, no language can describe her to you: she was everything that is noble and good, dignified and gentle, pious and sincere, and I soon became to love her as a daughter.

“ My attachment to Sidney was warmly returned by him, and our mutual love increased. Months ran on, and seasons passed; our engagement was known only to Florence, who saw in it the realization of her favourite hope. Fearing no opposition, we had no motive for

concealing our engagement; but Florence was in delicate health, and I suffered another spring to come, ere I urged Sidney to make his mother, whom we all so loved and honoured, a sharer in our unclouded happiness.

“He followed my advice, Alice, and told her all, but it was to me that her answer was given; and gently and kindly spoken as it was, her words were the seeds of death; and yet I could not, I did not even then blame her.

“‘Nina,’ she said, in her own soft, kind voice—I remember her very words—‘you are dear to me as my own sweet Florence. As her friend, and for your own sake, I have loved you very dearly; as the chosen of my darling son, I should be disposed even to love you better, and believe me, my child, when I tell you so; but, Nina Solari,’ she continued in a firm but mournful tone, ‘you cannot be his wife, or my daughter. I have no prejudice against your country—your birth and

rank are equal to his own, and you are worthy of the noblest—but my son must have a Protestant wife.’

“ And then she told me, how once in her father’s family, one of the sons had united himself to a Catholic, and the misfortune and wretchedness that resulted from it; and that she had herself made a firm resolution, a mental vow, ever to oppose such an union, should it be contemplated in the case of her own children; and with tears and bitter reproaches, that noble-minded lady accused herself of not having warned her Sidney of this—and I listened to it all, believing myself to be in a frightful dream.

“ I could not at once conceive the possibility of such utter wo; and when at last her earnest but grief-stricken accents roused me to the real knowledge of my situation, then, Alice, forgetting pride and dignity, forgetting everything but love, I fell at her feet, and implored her by her own hopes of mercy, to be merci-

to me, and unsay those fatal words. It was a trying moment for the mother, but she was firm, and her firmness conquered me, and ere that dreadful interview was over, I had agreed to leave England without even seeing them again. It was the excitement of the moment that enabled me to do it. I could not withstand her fervent prayers. She exacted no promise, but simply stated what her wishes were, and in a state bordering on madness, I consented to nothing.

‘I know,’ she said, ‘that it must be from me alone my son will consent to be released, and I should advise your writing to him when he is again in Italy, and, if you please, repeating this conversation; but if you intend to save his mother from a broken heart, and himself from future wretchedness and remorse, I will be firm, Nina, and refuse ever to see him correspond with him again. I ask no promise, for I trust all to you.’ I could not speak: and then, tenderly

embracing me, she put into my hands an English Bible, with these words—

“ ‘ My child, in your hours of solitude read this; read it attentively and with earnest prayer, and if ever from its perusal, by God’s blessing, you shall become convinced of, and reject the errors of the Romish church, then, my Nina, I need not say with what joy I shall welcome you to my heart, as the wife of my son, the sister of Florence, and my own dear daughter.’ ”

“ And I returned to the land of my birth, with a bruised and bleeding heart, and it was then I wrote my first and last letter to him I had so worshipped. I told him all that had passed between his noble mother and myself, and of my fixed determination to fulfil her wishes. I said nothing of the parting hope she had held out to me, for I felt how slight a one it was. I was no bigot to my religion, but that which we have been taught from our infancy to believe, is not easily relinquished for an-



creed ; and so I spoke not of this to  
ey, although I fully determined to study  
book she had given me, and at least en-  
our to form an impartial judgment between  
wo.

Sidney wrote to me in reply to my letter,  
every word spoke his deep and settled  
appiness. He did not try to combat my  
utions—his mother had more influence  
him than she herself believed—but he  
talked of hope, that hope which I had  
orne to mention to him, and even sent me  
berless books which he implored me to  
—and many letters followed that one, all  
of the most passionate tenderness and de-  
on ; but I replied to none of them. To his  
her and to Florence I often wrote—and they  
e kind and affectionate as ever. I told them  
I was fulfilling their wishes, and searching  
now the truth, but I told them not it was  
only occupation ; that I rejected all society,  
amusement, and devoted myself to that one

task alone. I told them not that the more I prayed for conviction, the farther it receded from me, and that I was forced to acknowledge to myself at last, that I sought it not for its own pure sake, but for the gratification of an earthly passion ; and that therefore my prayers were all unanswered. I told them nothing of this, Alice, but I felt it bitterly ; and my health declined under the struggle I endured. The exercises of my own religion afforded me no consolation, for was I not already a traitor to it? and yet the one I sought to adopt shed no soothing influence over me.

“ At length, the reason for my seclusion began to be conjectured among those whose society I refused, and my aunt told me it was whispered that she proud and wealthy widow was love-sick.

“ I had thought that I was steeled against all trifling annoyances, but my pride was deeply stung by these reports ; and from that time, Alice, I assumed, and I believe successfully,



outward gaiety of manner that, heaven knows, I was very far from feeling.

It was about this time I became acquainted with you. You were English, and my heart was won at once for your friendship. You gave me, dear Alice, and thus made me happier than I had ever hoped to be again. But you left me, and I sank into greater despondency than ever.

By degrees, my correspondence with Anne and her mother entirely ceased. I suppose they felt that my conversion was hopeless—at least I felt so myself—but still I had a strong desire to see this well-beloved country again; and you may remember my writing to tell you I was coming. At that time, however, I had a quarrel with my aunt, which detained me some weeks longer in Naples. I became reconciled, but she refused to accompany me again to England, a place she had always detested; so, leaving her in charge of my villa, I departed, accompanied only by

one or two of my household, and a faithful English waiting-woman, who had come with me from her own country. Poor Mary was almost as delighted as myself to leave the shores of Italy, and on our landing in England expressed such an anxious wish to visit her birthplace where her old parents lived, that I could not refuse her permission to go; and not caring myself whither I first bent my weary steps, I agreed to accompany her to this place.

“She had described it to me as a model of rural beauty; and though so late in the season when we came, I was not disappointed. The day after our arrival was the sabbath, and Mary, thinking it would be lonely for me to sit at home without a friend to speak to, engaged me to go to their little church. I had never before attended a place of Protestant worship, and the beauty and simplicity of the service struck me deeply. It was true there were no trained or scientific vocalists to sing

praises of their Maker; there was no ringing organ to reverberate through the ample aisles; but I missed them not, for there was that which must in the sight of God be a far more acceptable offering, the untutored but earnest voices of the congregation, joining, young and old, rich and poor, in holy songs of praise.

The sermon was short, and adapted to the capacity of the hearers; but its truthful eloquence penetrated to the heart. I saw many who had entered that little church with a red-down look of anxious care, leave it with an aspect of humble hopefulness, that claimed more than the most gifted tongues could do that this was the religion of God! With the rapid influence of feeling on the mind, I was half convinced already. That benevolent and intellectual-looking old man, the lowly but apparently sincere worshippers, had done more for me than months of earnest study had been able to accomplish. But I

rested not here. I sent for that faithful minister; I confided to him my doubts of the infallibility of my own faith, and my desire to know more of his; and with Christian patience, with a fatherly solicitude, he helped me to solve all my difficulties, explained all that appeared obscure, and finally, Alice, made me a complete proselyte to your beautiful and truthful religion. And think not while this was going on, that my thoughts and feelings were of the earthly reward my conversion would secure. I sought the truth for the truth's sake, and therefore it was that I found it.

“It was not until some weeks after my public profession of the Protestant faith, by attendance at the holy altar, that I indulged in those delicious hopes that sprang from it. And then I first thought of communicating the long-wished-for change to those who I felt would so rejoice to hear it; but again I hesitated, and shrank from the task as though it were forward

d indelicate ; not that I for a single moment doubted the continuance of Sidney's attachment, or the joy he would experience at hearing that the only impediment to our union was removed—it was no fear of this sort that made me lay down my pen so often, and resolve to wait another day ; but oh ! how I bless God that from whatever source it sprang, a feeling did exist which thus delayed my writing.

“ At length, one day I determined no longer to trifle with my destiny, and believing that I could find his happiness as well as my own in suspension, I succeeded in finishing a letter to Florence. It was short, and merely spoke of a change of faith, and told her where I was, without one allusion to her brother. However, it mattered not, for that letter never was sent. While I was in the act of sealing it, Mary came into the room with an old newspaper in her hand, saying, she had it from the mistress of the house, who thought it might



amuse the lady. I took it mechanically, and glanced my eye over it, not expecting to find anything interesting. I was deceived, however—miserably deceived, Alice—for my careless eye suddenly alighted on a paragraph that suspended my very breath. It was, ‘Married, at St. George’s, on Tuesday, Sidney, only son of the late Charles Saville, of Saville-court,’ to a certain Lady Cecilia—with a long list of those who had been present; and it said,” continued Nina, speaking hurriedly, “that this marriage had been delayed some months by the death of the bridegroom’s mother; and after that, were the sickening details of the happiness of the wedded pair, and their long attachment to each other. *That* at least was false—I knew it was; and so, when I had finished reading it, I believed it all to be equally so. Yes, strange as it may appear, my first feeling, as I laid down the paper, was indignation and astonishment that for want of actual news, people should dare to publish such fictions as these.

it lasted not long, that blessed incredulity. I went for more papers ; I made secret, though I was not, inquiries, and all the hateful truth was confirmed ; and now, Alice, my friend, my only friend, you are come to see how the broken-hearted die. You are come to soothe and comfort the last moments of one who will leave none but your gentle self to weep her sorrows. And I will die here, Alice, and be buried in that little churchyard, where I have so often wandered, and dreamt of coming to my happiness. It is all over now, and, Alice, you must not, if you would really soothe and cheer me, ever allude to what you have just heard. Read your sympathy in those beautiful eyes, and that is all I want. I must try for the future to fix my thoughts entirely on another world, for every feeling tells me that my time will be short in this. I feel the elements of life are passing away." "I am dying," she said, "and I am dying."

Alice strictly complied with her unhappy friend's request ; she made no allusions to

her past griefs, but strove, with every effort the most earnest affection could dictate, to wean Nina's own mind from dwelling on them—but this was no easy task. The old clergyman, too, visited her constantly, endeavouring to pour the balm of consolation into his proselyte's stricken heart—although, from being ignorant of the source her misery sprung from, he succeeded even less than Alice had done; and at length, by his advice, the latter urgently implored her friend to try a change of scene. Nina for some time vehemently opposed the idea. She had so long made up her mind to die there, and this wish she now clung to, with the tenacity and obstinacy of a confirmed invalid; but the winter was pretty far advanced, and the desolation of the lonely village every day increased. All around was cold, and damp, and dispiriting, and so at last Alice gained her point; and by promising to accompany her, succeeded in persuading



Nina to set out for Paris, the only place which she could be prevailed upon to go to.

They reached this city in due course of time, and the Signora's health was rather improved than otherwise by the journey. On her arrival, she wrote to her aunt, Madame de Rozel, begging her to join them. This request was immediately complied with, and having secured a pleasant villa within a few miles of the capital, the three ladies settled down there for the winter.

## CHAPTER VII.

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" But cannily step when ye come to court me,  
And come na' unless the back door be aje."

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THE following letter was written by Stuart Aylmer to an old college friend, about this time :—

*" Rome Oct., 18.—*

" DEAR ALFRED,

" The papers, if you ever read them, will have informed you of the recent death of my kind and worthy uncle. The pressure of circumstances attending this event has alone prevented me from replying to your

merous and searching questions. You accuse me of want of confidence, and a falling off of my ancient friendship; and from the slightest appearances of these, deduce the inference that I am in love. Now, it is my intention to disprove your two first insinuations, by making you the recipient of half-formed hopes and feelings; and as the last, though I shall not put your valuable friendship to the test by indulging in epodes beginning with a *Moore-ish* description of some fair one, still, since your letter implies that you really feel an interest in knowing what is passing in this doubting, unsettled part of mine, take the simple, unadorned narrative, and make the most of it.

You already know that about six months I joined my family in England, having been alien since my boyhood. That I was disappointed in some, and delighted in other members of it, will scarcely surprise you; but as not of them I am now to speak. My

father had been, some years ago, left guardian or joint-guardian with an old clergyman in Westmoreland to the daughter of a Mr. Herbert, an acquaintance in India, and this young lady had been domesticated with our family some short time when I arrived in England. When I tell you that it is to her I am attached, I need say nothing in the way of description, for everything of praise that I could write would naturally be placed to the account of a lover's partiality or blindness. One thing, however, I must add—because it is necessary to make you understand all my feelings—that Miss Herbert is an heiress; however, this did not (as perhaps it ought to have done) prevent me falling in love with her, and it was only when my mother—for I must tell you all—urged upon me the expediency of my marrying her rich and lovely guest, that I began to reflect on the construction which would naturally be put on such an act.

“ You have often accused me of being fasti-

us about some things, and I suppose this will be another of them. At any rate, from that time I dwelt often to myself on the folly of my immature hopes, for, added to my horror of being esteemed a fortune-hunter, and of deriving consequence chiefly through the wealth of my wife, was a fear that she herself, so young, so new to the world, might mistake the emotions of her own heart, and believe she had bestowed her affections, before in fact their powers were fully awakened.

All this elaboration of sentiment I know you will smile at, and in truth you will have the cause, for to my own mind it came too late to prevent me loving that sweet and beautiful girl; and what she felt I dared not conjecture, for I then resolved never to demand a return of the passionate devotion I gave—first, if I had won either wealth or fame that might be deemed an equivalent for the fortune she could bestow; and, secondly, till her feelings had been more matured by mixing with the



world, and I could be assured she chose me, not because she knew no other, but because, in knowing others, she preferred me to all.

“ ‘Vastly fine and high-flown,’ I can fancy I hear you saying, ‘but a very dangerous experiment.’ Granted: but I would rather lose her love, dear as it is to me now, than when we were married—remember, I am nearly thirty! she is hardly nineteen—rather an awkward disparity some would think. At any rate, I intend fully to keep the resolution I have made. It is therefore probable I shall not return to England for two years, but my plans are not yet decided. When they are so, you shall hear from me again. Till which time, believe me, dear Alfred, with undiminished regard,

“ Yours affectionately,

“ STUART AYLMER.

“ P S.—I have just heard that the least of the obstacles to my love is removed, for I am my uncle’s sole heir; and though my wealth falls very far short indeed of hers, still I am a

an of considerable fortune, and my motto henceforth shall be *Esperès toujours*."

The answer to this letter arrived as soon as might be, but it was only the postscript that influenced the fate of Stuart Aylmer. And it was this:—

"By the by, I understand our old friend Sir Felix Vaine is down in Derbyshire; and, if I mistake not, your family is in the very same neighbourhood. Now a little friendly advice might never to be unwelcome. And mine to you is this—abandon your mad scheme of travelling round the world to give your Dulcinea time to fall in love as often as she pleases, and come and look after your sisters in England. We know that gay Lothario of old, at least *I* do, and my impression is, that there are very few of his acquaintance who do not. For my part, I never could be brought to understand what women were in him to admire; but that's neither here nor there; we know what fools some of them were, and if we may credit Sir Felix's own

assertions, *none* have ever resisted his fascinations. Don't fancy I mean to imply any doubt of the allegiance of the ladye of your love, but you have sisters whose hearts may not be pre-engaged, so lose no time, but go at once, and look after the doings of that wolf in sheep's clothing."

Whether this advice was welcome or otherwise this history does not record, but simply states that it was implicitly followed; for in less than a week after the receipt of his friend's letter, Stuart Aylmer had bid adieu to the ancient city of Rome, and was travelling with all the speed the Italian system of conveyance allowed towards the white coasts of southern England.

"I am very glad she is fairly gone before Stuart's return," said Mrs. Aylmer to her husband, the first time they had an opportunity of speaking together after the return of the latter from conducting his young cousin to her friend.

"And why so?" was the quiet answer.

"Upon my word, Mr. Aylmer, you must



be blind not to have seen that there was a sort of fancied attachment between Stuart and Alice Norton; and the idea of encouraging, or permitting such folly, even before our son was one of the wealthiest young men in England, would have been absurd in the extreme; but now, when he may take his choice of any in the county (titles included), I absolutely shudder at the bare supposition of his lowering himself by a marriage with a paltry little cousin without a penny."

"Had Stuart been educated by you, Mrs. Aylmer," said the husband, "doubtless his ideas on these matters would have corresponded with your own, and those of your dutiful daughters. As it is, I am perfectly convinced that no consideration, either of title or fortune, will influence him in his choice of a wife; and I can only say, that if he loves that pretty Alice, and she loves him, he shall have my hearty consent to marry her."

"And mine *never!*" was the indignant an-

swer. "Really, Mr. Aylmer, you are too ridiculous," continued the affectionate wife. "Why, since it has been known in the neighbourhood that Stuart has succeeded to such a fortune, and is coming home, I have done nothing but answer notes of congratulation and invitation."

"Rather extraordinary to congratulate you on the death of your husband's brother. Is it not, my dear?"

"Pshaw! Everybody knows that he has been dying for the last ten years, and that you have not seen him for twice as many more. I tell you, Mr. Aylmer, your son may marry a duke's daughter if he pleases. I once thought of Miss Herbert for him, but I confess I shall now be content with nothing less than a titled wife."

"All very natural, I suppose, but I should have thought by this time you knew me too well, to give yourself the trouble of detailing your ambitious schemes to me. Where

is your friend Mrs. Nathan? She will do you the favour of listening, I dare say."

"She would, indeed, listen far more graciously to anything concerning my children's welfare, than their father ever condescends to do, but she is always out now."

"So much the better, my dear, for those who stay at home. I wonder you are not tired of her by this time."

"And if I were, it would be of little use, unless you would have me turn her out of the house. Even that would not surprise me from you!"

"Thanks, my love, for the compliment to my hospitality. At present I am thinking more of asking some one in, than of turning anybody out."

"And who is that?" said Mrs. Aylmer, with a slight show of interest. "Has Fanny taken some new fancy into her head, for I am sure you never study any one's pleasure but hers?"

"Perhaps my present plan may suit you and

your eldest daughter better than poor Fanny, though I shall certainly not carry it into execution without ascertaining whether it will be agreeable to her or not."

"Of course, my opinion is not of the smallest consequence."

"I am so certain not only of your approbation, but of your very particular satisfaction, should my invitation be accepted, that it would be a mere waste of time to ask it."

And with a formal bow, and a quiet good-morning, the husband departed, enjoying the idea of having put his heartless, fine-lady wife into a very restless state indeed. He was in the best humour, and the highest spirits possible; indeed, if he had not been so, he would never have talked so long on any subject to his affectionate helpmate.

Mr. Aylmer was not insensible to the good fortune of his son, and it would be unnatural and absurd to imagine that he did not rejoice at it, after shedding the tributary tear to the

memory of a brother whom he remembered only as the playmate of his boyhood; but although he gave the advantages of riches their due importance, and loved his only son as dearly as any son could desire to be loved, yet it was nothing connected with Stuart that caused the unusual gladness of the father's heart at present. It was the sight of a faint, a very faint bloom on his darling Fanny's cheek, and the sound of a low, but musical laugh which he

“ Had not heard for long.”

“ My precious child will recover yet,” said he, as he marked these cheering signs; and amid the bustle of the day and the stillness of the night, he repeated it again and again, “ my precious child will recover yet!”

On leaving his wife, he proceeded at once to the drawing-room in search of this beloved object of his most anxious thoughts; and finding her, as he expected, with Eva, communicated his errand at once.

“ Well, Fan, my pet, what say you to a ride

this morning, with your old papa for a beau?—or is it too cold to tempt you?"

"I shall be delighted to go with dear papa," said Fanny, with a determined effort at cheerfulness, "and will be ready in a moment—and perhaps Eva will accompany us?"

"I would with pleasure, dear Fanny," was the reply, "but I have promised to take a long walk with Miss Stanley before dinner."

"Besides," continued Mr. Aylmer, "I want to make a call, and I know Miss Herbert dislikes visiting."

"On whom?" demanded Fanny, looking rather less pleased.

"Why, on Lady Mostyn—to thank her, in the first place, for her kind congratulations on my brother's death, and to assure her that my son has not the slightest intention of throwing himself at the feet of her daughter."

Eva passed quietly from the room.

Fanny replied—"Surely, dear papa, you would not say anything so rude!"

‘Humph! Fan, I don’t see that it would be a bit ruder than her congratulations. I shall certainly tell her Stuart is engaged; it will save the poor boy a legion of annoyances. Your father says his accession of fortune has made him the best match in the county; and we all know what that entails. No, no, little Miss Fanny must look somewhere else for a husband, for she at all resembles her mama.”

‘And is this your sole purpose in calling me to-day?” said Fanny, somewhat astonished.

‘No, child, I have another purpose which, I call a *bonne-bouche*, I have reserved till the last; and that is, to invite Sir Felix Vaine and his cousin to spend their Christmas with us.”

‘Papa?”

‘Ah, I knew you would be astonished, but enough, after all, it is the most natural thing in the world. I find that Stuart and he are college friends, and I flatter myself it will

be an agreeable surprise to your brother to find him here. There is tolerable shooting in the neighbourhood, and I have ordered a new billiard-table from town. You know we must devise some means of keeping our rich man with us a little while, or he will want to be spending his money in London, and our being in mourning will prevent us gadding about much for a month or two; therefore I think nothing could be better than this plan of mine. Lady Julia seems a charming woman, and Sir Felix himself is universally sought after. The only thing is, will they come? But you don't answer, Fan. You can't see any objection to it?"

"None in the world, dear papa, if you think it will give the smallest pleasure to Stuart, or be the means of keeping him a day longer at home; but I confess it does not strike me that he and Sir Felix Vaine would accord well."

"Bless the girl! what nonsense has been put into your head? Do you imagine, because



r Felix possesses the reputation of being so devoted to your sex, that he cannot make himself vastly agreeable to his own?"

"It might be as well, at any rate, to consult your daughter before you give the invitation, papa."

"And then it would be too late, perhaps. No, no, Fan, let us go at once and do it—I will not abandon my scheme so easily."

"Well, I will be with you, then, in five minutes," said Fanny, leaving the room—and not longer did she keep her father waiting, but finding him as the horses were led to the door, she sprang lightly on her pony, and cantered briskly by his side over the smooth turf of the well-kept park.

A ride of half an hour brought them to the ancient, gray-stoned mansion of Sir Charles Mostyn, and, ascertaining that his lady was at home, they left their horses to the servant's care, and ascended to the old-fashioned but comfortable drawing-room.

Here they found Lady Mostyn with one of

the newest of the new novels in her hand, reclining, on a very easy sofa; and Lady Julia Maddy sitting near her, with a bullfinch perched on her finger, on which, every two or three minutes, she bestowed a most affectionate caress.

"Delighted to see you," said the mistress of the house, rising, and placing Fanny by her side on the sofa. "Mr. Aylmer, this visit is kind indeed. Julia and I are absolutely dying of ennui; nobody to go out with, and no one to stay and amuse us at home. As for Sir Charles, I never see him after breakfast, and Sir Felix is very little better."

Mr. Aylmer attempted to say something about the want of gallantry in leaving two such charming ladies alone, but Lady Julia's very visible accession of colour stopped him in the middle of his speech, and he abruptly asked her ladyship if she were fond of birds?

Now, considering that he had seen her kiss the one she held on her finger at least a dozen

ness since he came into the room, this was rather an unnecessary question, but it gave her time to recover her composure, which the mention of Sir Felix had so strangely disturbed, and she replied, with much warmth, raising her fine eyes to heaven, "Oh, I absolutely dote on the darling creatures;" and the expressions that followed this assertion so disgusted Mr. Aylmer, that he turned to Lady Mostyn, and inquired for her daughters.

"Ginevra is quite well," said the mother graciously, "and my sweet Pauline rapidly recovering. By the by, you have never seen Ginevra. I keep her to her studies during the morning; indeed it is her own choice, as well as my wish; but I am sure she will delight in welcoming such very kind friends, (bowing to the guests;) so, if it will not fatigue you too much, Miss Fanny, I will lead you to her little *sanctum*, and surprise the dear child."

Mr. Aylmer cast a side-look at his daughter, while their hostess continued—"Sir Charles,

who dotes on his children, particularly on Ginny, has contrived a charming studio for her. It was originally a sort of pavilion opening into the garden, a mere summer-room; but he has had it fitted up according to her taste, warmed with stoves, and made completely wind and water-tight. The conservatory is on one side, which fills the room with a delightful perfume, and being quite separate from the principal apartments of the house, it is perfectly quiet, and the very place for study. I sometimes fear the poor child will injure her health by such close application. I assure you (looking at Mr. Aylmer) she frequently passes a day without seeing a creature besides the servants."

Mr. Aylmer petitioned to be one of the party to the studio; and Lady Mostyn, giving a smiling assent, triumphantly led the way.

"I know," she said, on reaching the door, "we shall find the young student in *deshabille*, but for this I will make no apologies. A fine

ress would be very much out of place with the dusty folios you will find her poring over." and so saying, she softly opened the door, motioning to her visitors to follow.

They did so, and beheld a very pretty scene indeed, but certainly not the one Lady Mostyn had prepared them for. The apartment was hung with pale blue chintz, which gave it much the appearance of a comfortable tent; the curtains, chairs, and sofas were of the same colour, and the carpet was composed of deer skins, with one or two ottomans to match. A prettily-ornamented French stove was partially concealed by an Indian screen, and flowers from the green-house stood in vases of stained-glass at various parts of the room. There were book-cases of ebony, well filled with the means both of study and amusement; among their contents some respectably-sized folios were unquestionably to be seen, and, for aught that any casual observer could tell, they might be very dusty indeed, for they had the appearance of

not having been disturbed for some length of time.

But pretty and novel as this little apartment was, the eyes of the intruders fixed themselves at once, to the exclusion of every other object, on her, "of this fairy cell the sprite," and her companion—for the fair recluse for once had relaxed the severity of her, "close application," and admitted a visitor.

But that Lady Mostyn should not be thought to have too grossly misrepresented the nature of her daughter's pursuits, it must be confessed that Ginevra had a book before her, though it did not appear to be a dusty folio, while on an ottoman near her was a guitar, with half the strings broken. Yes, there was a book, and it was open too, and very pretty and interesting the young student looked, if student she may still be called, with her chestnut ringlets shading her very fair and youthful face, and her taper fingers pushed carelessly through them, looking whiter and more delicate from their



contrast to those shining tresses; and eyes of sweetest blue were bent eagerly on the book before her, to some passage in which a young and handsome man, who leant over her chair, was pointing.

It must not be imagined that the actors in this scene continued fixed in their attitudes, like *tableau vivants*, for the edification of the spectators; for one single instant only did they appear as described. An exclamation of something between horror and indignation, from Lady Mostyn, roused them both from that deep interest in their book, which the soft and cautious opening of the door had failed to interrupt.

"Ginevra! Percy Northcott!" was all that her astonishment and passion gave her power to utter, while Mr. Aylmer, unable to restrain himself, burst into a fit of laughter. Neither his mirth, nor her mother's evident anger appeared at all to discompose the fair occupant of the cell. Quietly placing a chair for Fanny, and receiv-

ing her visitors with courteous *nonchalance*, Miss Mostyn took a seat in the midst of them, and crossing her legs, (revealing a very small, pretty, and delicately slippered foot,) began conversing on the usual topics of the day; while Lady Mostyn, almost beside herself with astonishment, was attempting to explain to Mr. Aylmer that the son of Doctor Northcott had passed most of his early days at Baby-hall, where he was almost looked upon as a brother by her children. And after some time had been spent in these explanations, during which Ginevra looked perfectly unembarrassed, her Ladyship endeavouring, though ineffectually, to conceal her vexation, requested the rest of the party, including her daughter, to follow her to the drawing-room again. Mr. Aylmer, however, declined remaining longer, as he found Sir Felix was not expected home till dinner-time; and bidding a kindly and smiling adieu to the two fellow-students, and a polite one to Lady Mostyn, he departed, followed by



Fanny, who had contrived first to shake hands warmly with her new acquaintance, and to ascertain that the book she had been studying with Percy Northcott was Moore's "Lalla Rookh."

## CHAPTER VIII.

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"Then safe, though fluttered and amazed,  
She paused, and on the stranger gazed."

---

"UPON my word," said Mr. Aylmer, as soon as he had recovered from his third fit of laughter, as they were proceeding towards home, "that Miss Ginny is a very fine girl; and if it wasn't so plain that her little heart is given to that young sailor, I should have no objection to Stuart trying his chance with her. How you could keep your countenance, Fan, is a perfect marvel to me."

"If I had looked at Lady Mostyn it is very

likely I should not have succeeded in doing it; but I was so interested by the sight of that fairy-like girl, that I never thought of her mother—I expected something so different in a daughter of Lady Mostyn's."

"And to confess the truth, so did I, Fan. She has never been much with her fashionable parent, I'll answer for it."

"No, I have heard before that both the children were frequently left at Raby-hall with a governess, while their father and mother were in London or abroad."

"Ah, I see; and young Northcott has been their playfellow. He is getting rather too old, though, for this now, eh? But I have heard the Doctor speak enthusiastically of his son. He has just returned from a long cruise, I believe."

"Yes, we met him at Lady Mostyn's ball. I wonder if they are really lovers," continued Fanny; and she fell into a reverie which lasted till they had nearly arrived at home, when she

was suddenly roused by her father exclaiming, abruptly—

“ Here comes Sir Felix ! we are in luck’s way. Now for the invitation, Fan.”

Sir Felix was, as usual, only attended by his two dogs, and he manifested very decided symptoms of pleasure at the rencontre.

“ Good morning to you, Sir Felix,” began Mr. Aylmer ; “ rather cold to-day, but my little girl and I have braved the weather, and all on your account.”

“ You do me infinite honour,” replied Sir Felix, bowing very gracefully, and looking inquiringly towards Fanny, who was smoothing her horse’s mane.

“ I understood,” continued Mr. Aylmer, “ that you were about to leave this part of the country ; and as my son is just coming to it, I think it would be a vast pity, being old friends, that you shouldn’t meet ; so, if you can put up with the society of a quiet family like ours, do come and spend your Christmas at Elmcourt.”

Now there was nothing in the whole world that could at that moment have given Sir Felix Vaine more satisfaction than this invitation. Absorbed as he was in his own manifold attractions, he was far from being insensible to real loveliness in the fairer sex; and, although he had travelled far, and flirted with beauties of all lands, he had never yet seen a face that pleased him so entirely as that of Eva Herbert; and since the morning he had met her, his whole study had been how to meet her again. For some time, too, he had begun to think that a wealthy wife would be rather an advantage than otherwise to his position. He was far from being a rich man, and his tastes and habits made money a very desirable commodity. It had always been his intention eventually to marry; for marriage in *his* code of morals by no means implied the necessity of becoming a hermit, or giving up the practice of breaking all the hearts he could; and he never doubted that the moment he found such

a change of condition expedient, an heiress, and, if he required it, a beautiful one, too, would fall into his arms. The instant he saw Miss Herbert he believed his time was come; and the only difficulty, in his opinion, was how to gain access to her. This difficulty was now removed, and in the most easy and delightful manner possible; and he answered, with alacrity, that nothing could equal his pleasure in accepting the invitation; regretting only that he had promised to remain a fortnight longer at Raby-hall. Mr. Aylmer was enchanted; and, shaking his promised guest warmly by the hand, begged him not to forget his engagement, and then rode off, followed by Fanny, who had returned the bow of Sir Felix only as far as politeness required.

"I thought, papa," she said, as soon as they were out of hearing, "that you intended to ask Lady Julia Maddy also."

"So I did, child," was the answer; "but that wretched bullfinch changed my resolution. I

could'nt sit in the room and see a woman pecked all day by birds; I would as soon she allowed a snake or an eel to crawl about her. I begin to think there may be some truth in the story that old gossip told us the other morning, about Sir Felix refusing to marry his cousin. Why the husband of such a woman would stand in danger of being, not figuratively, but literally, hen-pecked."

Fanny smiled, as in duty bound, at her father's attempt at wit. And now they had reached the house, where Mr. Aylmer, lifting his child from her pony, and giving her a hearty kiss, desired her to go and dress for dinner, and then left her to do the same himself, first charging her not to say a word to any one of his invitation to Sir Felix, as he wished himself to communicate the intelligence, that he might see its effect on the different ladies of the party.

The cloth had been removed after dinner, the blazing fire stirred till it blazed still more

fiercely, and wine and walnuts were circulating rapidly amid the cheerful glare of the tall wax-lights, when Mr. Aylmer announced that he had something to communicate that would be found more interesting to the ladies than any discovery of a new Kalydor or Circassian Cream that the Times or Morning Post had ever advertised. "I confess," he continued, smiling and glancing around, "I am anxious to know which of you it will interest most, so I must entreat, ladies, that you will all oblige me by showing your faces, while I make the communication."

This was rather a formidable commencement, and two of the party changed colour instantly, but both from different expectations; these were Eva, and Charlotte Dacres. The blush of the former, however, died away, and left her fair cheek with only its usual tint, when Mr. Aylmer ended all suspense by telling them that their Christmas holidays would be enlivened by the presence of the Adonis of the



county, the admired and fascinating Sir Felix Vaine!

Eva's blush entirely subsided; it was evidently not *this* that *she* had expected: but it was different with Charlotte Dacres; for, though in his playful scrutiny of the countenances of his auditors, Mr. Aylmer fixed his eyes last on hers, the vivid, almost painful, crimson flush still dwelt there, and he laughingly declared that she was convicted of taking a more than ordinary interest in his intelligence. Charlotte made no reply, but a gloom gathered over her features, and Mr. Aylmer was not the only one of the party who began to fancy there was more in this than met the ear or eye.

And so in truth there was; but it was very little, and that little will be quickly told.

Charlotte Dacres, on first arriving at Elm-court, found some difficulty in giving up her country habit of walking before breakfast; and one morning, having passed a sleepless night, and tempted by the brightness of the sun, she

determined to venture an exploring excursion before the family was stirring. It matters not how long she walked, or how much or how little she enjoyed it; but in returning through a green valley, a row of very pretty white cottages attracted her observation, and she went close to the green palings to have a nearer view of their neatly-kept and still gay-looking gardens.

While standing to watch the antics of a lovely child that was playing in one of them, Charlotte was suddenly startled by the appearance of a large and fierce-looking dog issuing from the porch of this same cottage. On seeing her, the animal commenced barking furiously, and, pushing open the unlatched gate, seemed about to spring upon her. Now Charlotte happened to have a particular horror of strange dogs, and this adventure was anything but agreeable to her. She called to the child, but the little fellow only laughed merrily, and went on with his sports. At this moment a

gentleman appeared in the door-way, and seeing Charlotte's terror, advanced hastily to call off the dog. The animal obeyed the summons, and the stranger made many graceful apologies for the alarm the lady had suffered. He could not well have done otherwise, as the dog was his own, and what he said, anybody else would have said in the same situation, but this dog's master was a person who never uttered the commonest phrase, to a woman at least, without intending to produce a certain effect; and if he had always been as successful as in the present instance, there would have been some excuse for his constant boast that his powers of fascinating, when he chose to exert them, were irresistible. Charlotte Dacres *was* fascinated; and yet it was a small thing, a very small thing, that had brought about this prepossession; but who shall say it was unnatural? Things as trifling and words as meaningless, have had the like effect before, and will have again and again,

while hearts and eyes remain the same as they have ever been.

The lady, uttering a few unintelligible thanks, departed, but, as has been hinted, not so entirely fancy-free as she had come; and as a slight excuse for her, it may be as well to say that the dog's master was a very handsome man indeed, and it is hoped the surprise of the reader, if he should have felt any, at the suddenness of this fancy, will entirely cease when he is told that it was in fact no less a person than Sir Felix Vaine himself. Why he should have been found at that early hour of the morning at the white cottage, is not the business of this narrative to record. Charlotte wondered a little, and imagined at first it might be some charitable visit; but this idea the respectable, nay, even genteel appearance of the house, forbade; and if any other thought of a less praiseworthy motive suggested itself, she did not pursue the inquiry, and the whole affair she carefully concealed.

When, after this adventure, she heard Sir Felix Vaine spoken of as the handsomest man in the neighbourhood, and obtained, through Mrs. Nathan, who had often met him at different places, a description of his person, she could not doubt that this Adonis and the master of the dog was one and the same individual. Hence the pleasure she manifested at the thought of meeting him at Lady Mostyn's ball, and the unusual pains she bestowed that evening on the adornment of her person—although she felt, and bitterly too, that it was one, but little calculated to win the love she sought. And it has been already related how his compliments and attentions to her at the party, which accident alone occasioned him to pay (for he did not even remember her face,) increased her prepossession in his favour.

When Charlotte Dacres left the crowded room that night, her heart was given away; and it was a heart capable of the deepest and most passionate tenderness, requiring but one

gentle breath of love to kindle all its best and purest feelings, and to crush the bitter and unholy ones that, like noisome weeds, were springing there.

And Charlotte believed that the breath she had so long sighed for was come at last; that she was on the eve of being loved; and her long-pining and restless spirit revelled in the intoxicating hope. Had she known more of the world in which she was now mixing, or rather of the society that composed it, her ideas of the meaning of a few hollow compliments, even though they were "whispered low," would have been somewhat different. But Charlotte's days had been passed in the most complete seclusion; and the slight knowledge she possessed of what is called fashionable life was derived from the perusal of such second or third-rate books as are to be found in a country library; and these had taught her that love is all-powerful, and that, touched by its magic wand, the plainest face becomes

lovely, and deformity itself a grace. They had taught her, these edifying books, that the most ill-favoured and unattractive had been known suddenly to inspire an absorbing passion, more devoted and profound for its very singularity. "And why, then," thought Charlotte, "should even I despair?"

And happy indeed had it been for her, if that hope might have abided, which came like soft dew refreshing the parched dryness of her withering heart—for withering it was, with its ceaseless yearnings for ever unsatisfied, and its natural tenderness for ever checked. But a bright hope had arisen of sympathy long sought in vain, of an object on which to lavish those hidden depths of devotion that Charlotte panted with more than girlish eagerness to bestow. Had she but known how little such incense of the heart would have been valued by him whom her fancy pictured as so worthy to receive it, Charlotte might have been spared many after-pangs. A few days of unspeakable happiness

were hers, and even *that* was something. A few days of blissful dreaming, and Charlotte Dacres was half aroused from her illusion by hearing the character of Sir Felix Vaine discussed; but still she hoped it might be mere scandal, that some one jealous of his superior attractions had spread. He could not be a vain, heartless man of the world, boasting of his conquests, and delighting in witnessing his power; he had spoken to her of the pleasures of domestic life, the charms of retirement with a kindred spirit, and his own detestation of the cold forms of society. And every word had been accompanied with a glance, that told even more than his lips had uttered. Still, though to herself she professed to disbelieve all she heard, Charlotte was far less happy than before; and it was, consequently, with a mixed feeling that she listened to Mr. Aylmer's communication respecting his Christmas guest.

And now, having explained to the reader the true cause both of the blush and the frown,



it is necessary to return to the party who were left enjoying their nuts and wine.

The very evident discomposure of Charlotte Dacres caused a momentary embarrassment among them all ; and Mrs. Aylmer was about to make the sign to go to the drawing-room, when a loud ringing at the hall-door arrested her intention.

“ It is Stuart ! ” said Fanny, rising ; “ I am sure of it.”

“ Impossible,” replied Mr. Aylmer, looking very pleased notwithstanding ; while Miss Stanley darted a rapid and penetrating glance at Eva, who conscious of this *espionage*, turned red and pale by turns, and in her confusion completely covered the orange she was eating with salt. Fanny, who had run out of the room, now entered with joyful looks, exclaiming—

“ I was right, papa ! it is Stuart, and he will join us immediately.”

Mr. Aylmer rose from his chair.

“No, no, dear papa,” said Fanny, “if you go to him, he will never come down. Miss Stanley, Mrs. Nathan, Miss Dacres, pray tell papa you can’t excuse him.”

Miss Stanley, who was really excessively anxious to see Stuart, readily assisted Fanny in endeavouring to detain Mr. Aylmer—but there was an end to conversation, and for ten minutes nothing was heard but an occasional smothered cough, and the snapping of nutcrackers. At the expiration of this time, the door slowly opened, and the new-comer entered. The father and mother and Isabel eagerly rose to embrace him. This over, Mrs. Aylmer introduced her son to those ladies he had not previously known, while Fanny smilingly asked him if he had forgotten Miss Herbert?

Stuart advanced to where Eva sat, who half rose to meet him, and held out her hand. He pressed it warmly, and then took a seat beside her, and the conversation became animated and general—till the ladies at length retired.

On passing through the door which Stuart had opened for them, a geranium that Eva had worn, fell from her bosom. She turned to receive it, knowing that Stuart had picked it up, but he only bowed—and she went into the drawing-room after the rest.

## CHAPTER VIII.

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" Books are but formal dulness, tedious friends—  
And sad amid the social band he sits,  
Lonely, and unattentive."

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EVA did not appear to regret the loss of her flower, although it was the last blossom of a pet geranium, the slipping of which she had brought with her from Glandale, and had, to the discomfiture of the shrinking plant, removed from the hot-house, to her own room—on the contrary, her smiles this evening were brighter than they had been since her uncle's death; but still she sat apart from the others, and only occasionally looked up from her book to listen to Miss Stanley's

unmerciful teasing of poor Charlotte Dacres, on account of the emotion she had displayed regarding Sir Felix Vaine; and which pleasantries Charlotte, it must be confessed, bore very ill indeed; and at length, with a look of scorn and indignation at her tormentor, rose and left the room: and then it was that Eva, dreading lest she should be the second victim to her *ci-devant* governess's facetious mood, retired farther from the little group, and appeared deeply absorbed in the perusal of Campbell's Pleasures of Hope.

At this moment Mr. Aylmer and his son entered the drawing-room. There was a vacant seat beside Eva (had this circumstance influenced her in the choice of place?) but Stuart passed it, and joined his mother and sisters. They had much to speak about, and Isabella he had not seen on his previous visit to England.

And so the evening wore away, while Eva remained in her quiet corner alone, for Mrs.

Nathan had seized upon Miss Stanley, and Charlotte Dacres did not again appear. The "Pleasures of Hope" were laid aside, and some trifling work taken out, and Eva seemed to be "wandering in dreams," when suddenly a figure obstructed the light, and the next moment, looking up, she saw that the vacant chair beside her own was occupied.

"Do you too, Miss Herbert, think so highly of the gentleman whom my father has invited to pass his Christmas here?" said Stuart Aylmer, looking inquiringly at his beautiful companion.

A flush of pleasure had passed over Eva's countenance on perceiving who it was that sat near her, and for a moment she did not heed his question. Stuart repeated it in rather a more earnest tone, and then she replied—

"I have only seen Sir Felix Vaine, once, and I certainly thought him very handsome—do *you* not think him so?"

"Yes, he is generally considered a very handsome man, but——"

Eva looked up from her netting with surprise, and asked Stuart if he and Sir Felix were not old friends.

"Scarcely that," said her companion, with less embarrassment; "we certainly were at college together, but our pursuits and tastes were always so different, that the acquaintance never ripened into intimacy, much less friendship."

"Your father hoped to have given you an unexpected pleasure by his invitation to Sir Felix," said Eva, not very well knowing what to say.

"Humph—yes, it is certainly unexpected; but as all the ladies seem so much to rejoice at the prospect, it would be very ungracious on my part were I to do otherwise."

"I am sure," replied Eva, with earnestness, "*I* do not rejoice at it."

She was repaid by something more than a

grateful glance ; and here Fanny joining them, their tête-à-tête was put an end to, and the evening was soon concluded.

Winter had now commenced in earnest, and promised to be unusually severe. The party at Elmcourt grew very dull, for they were entirely restricted to in-door amusements, the continued snow-storms rendering it impossible, for the ladies at least, to leave the house ; and so they read and embroidered, and embroidered and read again, till all their books and all their German wool were exhausted, and their eyes heavier and their cheeks paler than was their wont, from want of air and exercise—or what perhaps would have answered as well, something to amuse and interest them. Stuart had exerted himself wonderfully for their entertainment during the first week of his return, and for that time they got on pretty well ; but who could be expected to stand such weather long ? who could look out day after day on drifting snow-storms that left not a blade of green grass



visible, and listen to the ceaseless sound of the small dry snow driven against the window-panes by the fierce north wind, and continue in good spirits? Who indeed! Some such question was asked, and some such answer given every morning; the very birds that hopped to the window in search of crumbs, and had been fed so zealously for a while, began to meet a careless or ungracious reception from their fair but spirit-wearied benefactresses. They were almost becoming ill-tempered, one and all!

But at length Christmas-eve arrived, and Sir Felix Vaine was expected to dinner the following day—that was something; and to remain at least a fortnight—that was something more. Christmas-eve arrived, and Mr. Aylmer declared they should play at snap-dragon and forfeits. In vain they all protested they hated forfeits, and that snap-dragon was only a game for children. No matter; there had been gloomy faces long enough; snap-dragon would rouse them, and snap-

dragon they should have—he had made up his mind. And so a huge punch-bowl of brandy and raisins was placed on the table. Mr. Aylmer himself applied the light to the spirit, exclaiming in a most praiseworthy tone of animation—

“ Now, young people ! young people ! make haste ; Mrs. Nathan my dear ma’am, this is quite in your way. Miss Stanley, I see your eyes sparkling ; Stuart, my boy, don’t push before the ladies. (Stuart was reading very quietly at the other end of the room.) Bella, the Frenchmen don’t give you anything so sensible as this. Now then, now then, but mind, fair play—fair play’s a jewel—don’t knock each other down.”

This last injunction at least seemed perfectly unnecessary, for though they all stood looking at the flaming bowl, not one of them showed the slightest inclination to appropriate to herself any portion of its tempting contents. Yet still Mr. Aylmer was indefatigable in his invitations.

“What! cowards! ladies, cowards! afraid of burning your pretty fingers? Snatch quickly, and you won’t be hurt, you won’t, upon my word. Come! here’s a prophesy for you. The first who ventures through this ordeal of fire, will win the heart of Sir Felix Vaine; the second will be a bride before the roses bloom; and the third—what shall happen to the third fair raisin-hunter? Ah, she who won’t venture till two have gone before, must be content with a less brilliant destiny; so this third part of a heroine only, whoever she may be, must be satisfied with the heart of that long-faced young man there—what say you, Stuart?”

“I say, sir, that you have effectually closed your bowl of sweets to any third applicant, by promising such a paltry recompense,” replied Stuart, apparently not in the best of spirits.

“Well, well, we shall see, for now the procession advances.”

And in truth, several smiling faces *did* ap-

proach nearer at this prediction, and much whispering and laughing was heard amongst them.

Ah ! Mr. Aylmer, with his George-the-Third manner, was not such a fool after all, though he did order snap-dragon for grown-up young ladies.

But now several of them agreed to extend their hands at once, and trust to their chance of " pulling out a plum ;" accordingly, numbers of white fingers were the next instant dancing in the pale blue flame ; but whether it was by any dexterity of Mr. Aylmer's in pushing the raisins on one side, or through her own more zealous efforts, certain it is, that none this time followed the example of Master John Horner but Charlotte Dacres. The other hands were withdrawn ; but either they had failed to obtain, or having obtained, allowed their spoils to drop into the bowl again. At any rate, Charlotte, who produced a fine large raisin, was pronounced the victor, and received with manifest

confusion, but not ill-humour, the quizzing and congratulations of her companions. The second was gained by Fanny, whose spirits rose in consequence to an extraordinary height; and much loud merriment ensued.

They still continued to surround the table, all talking and laughing together; and Mrs. Nathan, who had suddenly disappeared, now returned with a not very fresh wreath of orange blossoms—the same probably that had played their part at her own nuptials with the wealthy Jew—and insisted on binding them round Fanny's head. The latter playfully resisted, and while all eyes were turned towards the light-hearted girl, Eva, who stood nearest the table, during the confusion put her hand, as it were carelessly, into the bowl, and drew out the third plum.

The flame was nearly extinguished, so it was easily done; and none were looking that way. Stuart was still at the other end of the room, and the lamp was between them.

It was a silly thing to do, and a strange, but by no means an unusual feeling that prompted it—a fanciful idea that will sometimes arise in the mind, to make the changing form of a cloud, or the dimness or brilliancy of a star the indices of future destiny. But why seek excuses for a person in love? It is enough to tell that Eva did it, and then, timidly raising her eyes, she examined the countenances of the surrounding group. All safe!—none had noticed her foolish act. They had succeeded in twisting the orange blossoms in Fanny's hair, and were loudly expressing their admiration of the effect. All safe there, but she must peep behind the lamp. There can be no fear though, for Stuart has got a very interesting book, and one which she herself had asked him to read.

But there is no book in the world so interesting as the form of the beloved. So thought, at least, Stuart Aylmer, and his book had been little heeded. And how he blessed his good

father for his efforts to promote the gaiety of his guests, and above all, how entirely he admired and approved of the game of snap-dragon, when he saw those white, taper fingers steal so gently into the bowl and bring out something closely concealed between them. He had scarcely recovered from his pleasing surprise—for with the natural vanity of men, which never suffers them to misinterpret a compliment really paid them by a woman, he did not for an instant doubt what feeling it was that prompted the theft—when Eva peeped behind the lamp.

Their eyes met, and the culprit saw that she was detected. Shame, embarrassment, confusion—tame, weak words are ye all! to express what her feelings were at this moment. What shall she do? how explain away this hopelessly revealed folly? What must *he* think—what will he say? Perhaps betray her to all the rest! But no! Stuart loved what he had so accidentally seen too well, to wish to

share it with others. He rose and left the room, unobserved except by Eva.

In the mean time the game continued. Mrs. Nathan obtained (as was supposed) the third plum; and the merriment at this rose higher. Stuart returned, and was called upon to pay homage to his future bride. He made a very pretty speech to her, and only once looked at Eva, whose embarrassment had by no means diminished. A country dance succeeded, and before the evening ended, there was not one gloomy face amongst the whole party, though the small dry hail pattered fiercely against the windows, and those who drew aside the curtains to look out upon the night, only saw, through the parts of the large panes which were not quite covered with snow-smothering drifts sweeping noiselessly over the white land and frozen trees.

Eva was the only one of the party who did not dance. Her mind was still in a tumult, but Stuart behaved very well, for with the ex-



ception of looking much happier than she had ever seen him before, he showed no signs of having guessed her preference for him; on the contrary, his manner was even more respectful than usual; so by the time "good night" was to be said, she felt in some degree composed; and the slight pressure of the delicate hand which he ventured at parting, was only what a sister might have received.—And Eva's dreams that night were happy ones.

## CHAPTER IX.

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What dangerous action, stood it next to death,  
Would I not undergo for one calm look?  
Oh 'tis the curse in love, and still approved,  
When women cannot love where they're beloved !

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THE next day was one of bright sunshine through a clear frosty air, and everybody looked gay. The party from Elmcourt attended the village church, then took a walk in the park, and then returned to dress for dinner. And dinner and Sir Felix came, both at the proper time; and the former could not have been better cooked, nor the latter more bewitching, than on the present auspicious occasion. The handsome baronet divided his attentions

admirably, so that not one lady, from Mrs. Jeremiah Nathan to Charlotte Dacres, could say she had been less attended to than the others. He took wine in abundance with all, talked sentiment with some, and scandal with others. In short, there was but one opinion among the female portion of the party when they retired to rest that night, and it was that the presence of Sir Felix Vaine would be found to be a very great acquisition indeed. Not that in other respects every one thought exactly the same of their new inmate. Indeed there were probably not two who estimated him alike; but all agreed that in some way or other, he would contribute immensely to their entertainment.

The sharp frost continued; but still the sun shone, and no one stayed in the house. Stuart each morning tried in vain to persuade his father's guest to accompany him with his gun; Sir Felix preferred the ladies' society. When they walked or rode, he was their attendant,

and when it was their pleasure to remain at home, he was sure to find some amusement in the library too—and Stuart absented himself more and more.

Did any one regret this, or was even Eva fascinated with the handsome and insinuating stranger, whose devotion to herself became every day more apparent? Time will show; at any rate, whatever doubt might exist with regard to her feelings, there could be none respecting his. He loved her—for the first time in all his butterfly-life, the heart of the pleasure-seeker was touched, and he even believed that had he not really wanted money so desperately, he would have been proud to have made her his wife had she been penniless. But thanks to the fortunate star that presided at his birth, the disinterestedness of his attachment had not to be tried by so severe a test. Eva Herbert was as wealthy as the most ambitious suitor could desire, and Sir Felix now began to receive his rather heavy bills with the

greatest coolness in the world. If ever a doubt of being accepted crossed his mind, he had but to walk to his looking-glass, and the apprehension was dispelled; but as his passion and his bills increased, so did his impatience to declare himself and make all sure, especially as once or twice he had fancied—it might be only fancy—but he *had* fancied that Eva seemed more animated and happy when Stuart Aylmer joined their coterie, and proportionately depressed when he left it again.

“Ah! this is just the day to make a declaration of love; the sun warm, but not too bright—I hate the sun to be too bright—the air bracing, but not too cold—a very frosty day is so confoundedly unbecoming. *Courage donc, mon brave.* The very elements smile upon you.”

Thus soliloquized Sir Felix one morning on rising from his bed, after he had been about a fortnight at Elmcourt; and his toilette that day was even more elaborate than usual.

Breakfast was over, and every one dispersed in their different pursuits of amusement.

Mr. Aylmer took Isabel and Fanny to call on the Northcotts; Mrs. Aylmer took Mrs. Nathan to enjoy a tête-à-tête in her own room; Miss Stanley retired to write letters; Stuart offered his escort to Charlotte Dacres, who wished to take a walk, and Eva went to the library to read or to think.

Sir Felix declared he had a thousand important letters to answer, and declined going out of the house.

The reader must be content to imagine how the different parties got on together, and follow Eva to the library. She went thither to read quietly and peacefully; a good book is such a charming thing to tranquillize the spirits, and a silent library just the place in which, when they are out of sorts, it should be perused. So at last she believed till she tried, and then she began to think that of all things in the world reading is the most irksome when the mind is

ill at ease. Well then, she would try to draw—but the drawing things had been put away, and it would take an hour to find them. No matter; something she must do, and so, mounting on a chair, she commenced a diligent search for the missing portfolios. At length they were discovered in a corner of a very high shelf, and Eva, in trying to reach her own, pulled two or three others down at the same time; numerous drawings fell out, and she stooped to pick them up. Suddenly a deep blush overspread her face, as she looked again and again at a small pencil sketch which she had found. It represented various female figures naturally and gracefully grouped, and at a short distance from these, another and very lovely one standing alone. Near her was a table with a bowl on the centre of it, towards which the hand of this last figure was extended. The expression of the countenance, for a mere sketch, was most admirable; and Eva recognised the scene and the artist but too well—but how should

she understand this delineation of it? It might have proceeded from admiration and gratified affection, or it might be a proof that he ridiculed her fond folly—but this latter thought was too chilling to be endured; she remembered his retention of the geranium; and tears, but not unhappy ones, gathered in her eyes. Quickly replacing the drawing, Eva sat down to meditate on all these things.

Footsteps now sounded in the passage—a hasty hope flashed through her mind that they might be those of the object of her thoughts; and a flush had come again to her cheek, and a glad smile to her lips—when the door opened, and Sir Felix Vaine stood before her.

It will not be wondered at, that he immediately interpreted the smile according to his own wishes; and taking a seat beside her on the glossy morocco ottoman, said in those low, courteous, but confident tones—the true elements of that persuasion which falls so dangerously on the ear of woman—



that he trusted he did not disturb Miss Herbert.

"Not at all, Sir Felix," replied Eva. "I shall gladly resign to you the sole use of the library, for I have been an idler too long this morning, and am now going to see if I can find something to do." And she rose as she spoke.

"Nay, nay, Miss Herbert, do not let me drive you away. Pray sit down—you will oblige me exceedingly by doing so." And Sir Felix, with the accomplished ease of a person accustomed to have his own way, pointed to a place beside him on the ottoman.

"If you have anything particular to say to me, Sir Felix, certainly I will listen to you," said Eva, quietly resuming her seat.

"I have, indeed, something of the utmost importance to say to you," said Sir Felix, throwing his fine person into an elegant attitude of reposing grace; "in fact, I have sought you here for the express purpose of

saying it. You cannot, dearest Miss Herbert," (and the low, soft tones, as they came from the well-cut lips of this arrogant but accomplished coxcomb, had that apparent chivalry which the humility of manly pride gives to the devotion to beauty)—"you really cannot, dearest Miss Herbert (and he gave a melancholy smile, which displayed a very regular set of well-kept teeth, the whiteness of which contrasted strikingly with the polished jet of his artistically trimmed whiskers)—be ignorant of the sentiments with which you have inspired me—nay, I implore you to attend to me—who could see such gentle excellence and perfect loveliness daily, and be insensible to the influence of their charms? Oh, if you would deign to give me the smallest hope that I am not quite indifferent to you—that time, assiduity, and the most devoted affection could ever win your precious love—if you would give me this little hope, beloved, adored Eva, I should indeed be the happiest and most to be envied of mankind."

Eva had risen from her seat, but she still stood in the same place, waiting till her companion's speech was concluded. Finding he hesitated, she raised her head, and replied:—

"Sir Felix Vaine, I have only been silent so long from surprise. Far from guessing your sentiments towards me, I really believed that you had never thought twice of anybody but yourself. I am sensible," continued the dark-eyed beauty, her pretty red lips slightly trembling as she spoke—"of the high and undeserved honour (for Eva's tropical blood was unused) of obtaining a place in your regard, but at the same time I cannot help desiring it, because it is quite impossible that I could ever have any other feelings towards you, than those I at present entertain."

She advanced towards the door.

"Miss Herbert," said Sir Felix, pale with astonishment (for the accomplished baronet, in spite of his graceful humility, and unknown to himself, had shown something of

"throwing the handkerchief," in the steadfast confidence of his guise—a frequent error of men of later youth who have had the reputation of being favourites with women; but which, when out of place, never fails to have an insolence which arouses woman's dearest pride.)

"Miss Herbert," said Sir Felix, pale with astonishment, and starting forward between her and the door, "I beseech you, retract what you have said. You would not, angel of goodness as you are, doom me to a lot of such utter misery as the absence of all hope of ever obtaining your regard—at least, bid me not despair."

"Sir Felix, I must pass; this conversation is very disagreeable to me. You have my answer, and I will not be detained."

"Good heavens! Miss Herbert, what have I done to incur your anger? I am astonished, confounded—some prior attachment I fear; but you are young, very young—your sentiments may change."

"Never towards you, Sir Felix; and once more I insist on being allowed to leave the room."

"Far be it from me, Miss Herbert, to detain any lady against her wish. The novelty of your treatment has certainly taken me by surprise; but at least you will permit me to enquire the name of my happy rival?"

"It needs no rival to make me decline your proposals, Sir Felix."

"Miss Herbert, pardon me, but this is an evasion unworthy of you. That I *have* a rival I am convinced," continued he, becoming more excited. "I am so unaccustomed to this disclaim from your sex, that I can account for it in no other way. But let him look to it—I have never yet been foiled, nor will I be so now, should all the powers of heaven and earth conspire against me!"

This last part of his speech was addressed to the book-cases, for Eva had disappeared; and Sir Felix walked up and down the room in a

state of the most dreadful excitement, for space of nearly an hour. At the end of time he sauntered to the drawing-room, stood for a few minutes before one of the mirrors.

And what so soothing as this contemplation of himself! Sir Felix *was* soothed, and repeating once more, *courage, mon brave*, went to his own room to answer the letter of his most importunate creditor.

## CHAPTER .X.

---

"*Lucetta*. Of many good I think him best.

"*Julia*. Your reason ?

"*Lucetta*. I have no other but a woman's reason ;  
I think him so, because I think him so."

---

It is a positive fact, although at first it may appear incredible, that no extraordinary revulsion of the laws of nature followed the remarkable phenomenon of Sir Felix Vaine being rejected—his love rejected! his hand rejected!! himself rejected!!! Sir Felix Vaine, who had accomplished, the fascinating, the irresistible, had at length experienced that hitherto (as far at least as he was concerned) fabulous mortification ; and yet no stars had fallen from

the heavens, and the sun still shone with its accustomed brightness! All this to Sir Felix seemed very odd indeed.

In his moments of deepest despondency—for even *he* had such moments sometimes—in his moments of deepest and wildest despondency, the idea of his unlimited influence over the fairer portion of the creation ever ceasing, had not once occurred to him, and how could it fail to startle him now? Sir Felix *was* startled, although his deeply-rooted confidence in himself was noways shaken by it. The bright spirit of impudence the comforter, kept alive his faith in his own invincible powers; a girlish attachment had indeed interfered for the moment with his hopes, but that was a trifle. Time, time, he continued to assure himself, was all he required to beat any rival out of the field, and win the most stubborn heart.

Had Eva, as Sir Felix certainly expected, listened with rapture and gratitude to his proposals, a very few weeks would probably have



exhausted his love and admiration; but as the reverse was the case, his desire to obtain the beautiful heiress was increased tenfold, aggravated also by its encroaching necessity; and the two most powerful feelings of his nature being thus aroused together, he was fully determined, that by some means or other, Eva Herbert should be won. And he was not a scrupulous person by any means.

Unfortunately, time, which was all he wished for, was not (as has been something more than hinted) at his disposal—for the want of funds afflicted him sorely. Money he must obtain, and quickly too; and Eva, in two senses of the word, he could not live without.

Here then was a perplexity; and long, very long, Sir Felix stood before his glass, trying to hit upon some plan that would secure to him both those now feverishly wished for possessions. But neither his whiskers, nor his glossy hair, nor his handsome figure, and distinguished mien, captivating as they un-

doubtedly were, suggested any encouraging hopes of such immediate success with the beautiful and wealthy brunette, as the occasion required. It was clear that while the grave but handsome Aylmer possessed the heart he coveted, he could make but little progress, and his first step must be to conquer her of that attachment.

But how was this to be done? Suddenly Charlotte Dacres flashed upon his mind. That he had seen her admiration, and more than guessed her love for himself, will excite surprise in the intelligent reader. There never was a more quick-sighted man than Felix Vaine in matters of this sort. He was perfectly aware that had *she* been beautiful and an heiress, the polished mirror before him would not now have reflected a rejected lover, and the idea that he might, by means of his attachment to himself, make her useful in his present difficulties, presented itself in the sudden brightness of a new hope.

Sir Felix indeed did not intend to go to the devoted Charlotte and say, "Miss Dacres, I know you love me, but as I happen to love somebody else, I am come to ask you to assist me in gaining the affection of that person." There were many better ways than that, and at all events the first thing must be to make poor Charlotte believe that she herself was the one beloved. Sir Felix had certainly no very clear idea of the *next* step in the affair, but that, he doubted not, would suggest itself. In any case, a little flirtation with so clever a girl as Miss Dacres would do no harm. It would even amuse him, for Sir Felix had penetration enough to see that she whose dark eyes he often detected fixed upon himself, was no common-place woman; and it might pique Eva in spite of herself, to perceive his attentions transferred to another. Altogether, he was highly pleased with the idea, as it was not only one in accordance with his judgment, but his feelings

and inveterate habits. Prompt in all things connected with love, he straightway proceeded to put it in execution.

Charlotte Dacres had not seen unmoved the devotion of Sir Felix Vaine to Eva Herbert. Day by day she had watched his looks of passionate admiration, and her very inmost soul had writhed at the conviction that to her they would never be directed; and night after night, she too had stood before her mirror, looking with despair at the unlovely countenance reflected there, while tears of the heart's bitterest agony rolled down her cheek.

She knew now that Sir Felix Vaine was not what her imagination at first had pictured him; she could not help seeing he was vain and worldly, and incapable of those higher and purer feelings which she had then given him credit for—but she did not cease to love, though her respect might be in some degree lessened by the knowledge of his character, which had grown upon her—she did not cease to love, for

his idolatry had become a part of her being, but she ceased to hope that her love would ever be returned; and the little joy she had known in life was turned to poison now. And when Sir Felix, in pursuance of his scheme, once more whispered words of flattery in her ear, Charlotte listened with a bitter smile, and despised herself for thus listening, far more than the man who she felt deserved contempt alone.

And Eva, it must be confessed, bore the desertion of her admirer with wonderful equanimity. But perhaps this was in some degree owing to her having taken a sudden fancy to improve her knowledge of Italian; and Stuart, with extraordinary good-nature had undertaken to be her preceptor; and so intent were both teacher and pupil on those studies, that neither of them observed much of what was passing around them.

It mattered not to them that Charlotte and Sir Felix flirted whole hours together—that Mrs. Aylmer and Isabel looked cross and in-

dignant; that Miss Stanley and Fanny smiled significantly to each other; and that Mrs. Nathan talked mysteriously of double weddings, and lovers reconciled. Eva had certainly convinced Stuart that he had no reason to be jealous of Sir Felix Vaine, and Stuart seemed to be on the point of convincing Eva that he lived but with the hope of winning her love, when an event occurred which materially altered the whole aspect of affairs.

## CHAPTER XI.

---

" Had I been seized by a hungry lion,  
I would have been a breakfast to the beast,  
Rather than have false Proteus rescue me!"

---

A fortnight had elapsed since the unsuccessful proposals of Sir Felix Vaine, and still he spoke not of leaving Elmcourt, and was very far from wearing the look of a rejected lover. It might be that Charlotte Dacres had consoled him; for his gaiety was more constant, his conversation more sparkling, and his aspect more steadfastly cheerful than they had been since she came amongst them; and Charlotte, in spite of her reason—in spite of her convictions—in spite of that still, small voice within, which

assured her that there was no vitality in the happiness she gave up her heart to enjoy, Charlotte herself looked happy too; and though many marvelled how one so unattractive could have even for a day fascinated this fastidious and worldly-minded man, none doubted (so far did his attentions proceed) that she had done so.

The winter days still continued white. The earth for many weeks had been shrouded by the snow, and slight thaws had only been succeeded by more bitter fits of frost. On one of those cold gray mornings, when the sky is overcast, and the ice-bound land looks dull, for all its whiteness, some one proposed at breakfast that Sir Felix and Stuart should teach the ladies to skate on the frozen mere in the park. The idea was loudly applauded. Eva had been already slightly instructed in this exercise, on the lakes of Westmoreland; and it so happened that the two gentlemen piqued themselves upon their skill on the ice, and each was



sirous to distinguish himself in this graceful and manly exercise. Indeed, Sir Felix Vaine was one of those rare men who are never at a loss when any claim of society, however apparently opposed to their general habits, is made upon them—and he excelled in them all. He was a capital shot, an excellent and graceful rider, and a fearless and clever huntsman. However deficient in real nobility of character, he had the coolness of dauntless personal courage, and the impudence of the arch-fiend himself; that corrective to personal vanity which men's society in so many instances affords to fops, had its place in the influences of his character; companions who had weak brains and strong bodies, however indignant they might be at the unbearing vanity of this whiskered Pandour baronet, endured it from a knowledge of his excelling in those manly feats of bodily skill, which were the most ardent wish of their own miserable ambition to become distinguished; while clever men, who cared little for such

things, also fought very shy of Sir Felix, for himself, a person of great natural parts, shrewd and in the enjoyment of that subtle power in society which a superior intellect devoted to the business of the fashionable world creates and blessed with the absence of enthusiasm on any subject or occasion ; he had a self-contained aptness of retort, an imperturbable ease and composure, which by irritating the sensitiveness of his assailant, and amusing the animal spirit of those around him, seldom failed to overwhelm with confusion even men of superior minds. And thus it was, that the accomplished baronet's coxcombries were of altogether too imperial a kind, to be rubbed away by the casualties of an extensive contact with society. But all this is by the way.

The proposal to skate upon the mere, as has been told, was warmly applauded, and all the ladies declared themselves delighted at the idea of being taught this accomplishment, provided the ice should be pronounced strong enough.

to bear them. A few of the party, headed by Mr. Aylmer himself, immediately started to ascertain this, and the others anxiously waited to learn the result.

"Anything in the world for a change," said Isabel, yawning; "this country life is positively *faire mourir*."

"Anything for a change!" was echoed by most of her companions, in a tone that left little doubt of their sincerity.

The reconnoitering detachment soon returned, and declaring the ice to be in a safe condition, in a few minutes the whole party was prepared to set out.

Sir Felix Vaine had tried every means to secure Eva as his pupil, but Stuart persisted that he had a better right to her; and the matter being referred to the lady herself, Eva laughingly declared that it was more convenient to have but one master; and Stuart being already her instructor in Italian, she must decide for him.

This was the first time she had expressed her preference, and Sir Felix turned his eyes abruptly from her blushing face and darted a covert look of polite scorn at her, who however appeared entirely unconscious of this attention ; so entirely occupied with his beautiful pupil.

There was no sunshine this day, except on the young hearts that beat gladly with gladness and hope ; there was no sunshine, the air was bleak and cold ; yet never had the earth seemed so lovely, or the blue sky so pure in their depths, as this wintry day seemed to Stuart Aylmer and Eva Hervey.

They walked side by side, and often he turned, as a keener blast of wind swept to draw her furs closer round her, and she would whisper some of those low-toned words which have an interpretation beyond their plain meaning ; and Eva's sparkling eyes grew more and their light more subdued, when they came to those whose every tone was music to her, fell

her ear; and her words too, though they were few, seemed to tell something of the affection she cared not now to conceal, for her companion wore that beaming look of fervent joy, which bounding hope alone can give—and they were both very happy.

In the meantime Sir Felix Vaine and Charlotte Dacres also walked and talked together, and their conversation was rather more intelligent in the signification of its words.

“Charlotte, (he had long called her ‘Charlotte’ when they were alone,) to what active extent do you imagine the devotion of a woman to a man would extend?”

“The records of all ages have proved that woman’s love has no limit.”

“Exactly. I perfectly agree with you as to the existence of those delightful records; but supposing for a moment that they did not exist, what would be your own opinion of the matter?”

“My own opinion, Sir Felix, on this, as on any other subjects, I should be unwilling to

expose to the ridicule of those who—  
thought—differently.”

“ But surely, Charlotte, you can have no fear of that now. You know how ready I always am to adopt your ideas, and how many of my own your influence has changed. Charlotte, I need not tell you, for you have eyes to see, the power you possess over me. I never yet met a woman like yourself. Of lovely faces I may have seen, but you have qualities of a higher nature than mere beauty. Charlotte, Charlotte, my mind has bowed before yours, and I am a willing captive—but do not drive me away so coldly. Tell me I am not deceived in believing myself beloved. Oh, my presumption should have led me to misinterpret the sweet expression of those eloquent eyes. Speak, love; may I say my love? Charlotte, speak.”

And Charlotte did speak, and her words, though very low, were full of fervent eloquence. The tempter's subtlety had once more



lived, and her whispered answer told all deep, deep love that had so long burned her restless heart; and it needed not the crimson flush that had settled on her cheek, the too brilliant sparkling of her usually thoughtful eye, to assure Sir Felix that the eloquent words which fell on his ear came from her inmost soul. And he was happy, for he had now succeeded in everything but his former views; and he felt the gratified pleasure which a skilful and habitual whist-player would experience at rapidly winning his favourite game. And so another heart was won, but the first was broken.

And now when again in even more tender moments he repeated his question respecting her opinion of the devotion of woman, Charlotte, in the excitement of the moment, poured forth a flood of eloquence the burden of which was to assure her listener that all the records of former ages told but of faint, cold deeds, compared with what she herself was capable

of doing or sacrificing for one she  
And Sir Felix smiled more complacently  
ever; and felt something resembling gratification  
to the loving woman at his side, who  
doubted not would assist him in his difficulties  
and bring him to the wished-for haven.

Further conversation was for the time  
stopped, for they had reached the water  
and the preparations for skating commenced.

It is not necessary to record how gracefully  
some, or how awkwardly others of the  
young novices glided over the frozen water  
under the guidance of Sir Felix and Stuart.  
There was much merriment at first, and both  
tutors and pupils were indefatigable in their  
exertions; but by degrees all became weary  
except Mrs. Nathan, who still persisted in  
exhibiting her not very sylph-like figure  
practising various difficult evolutions to which  
others had declined attempting; and from  
their excessive tendency to throw  
down, severely tried the skill and good



her supporter Stuart, to whose lot she had  
en; nor would she hear of his leaving her  
, although the rest of the party, with the  
ception of Eva who stood shivering on  
bank, had some time dispersed and were  
entering about the park in pairs.

Many a glance did the now impatient young  
cast towards his first pupil, who, he was  
enough to believe, waited there for him—  
ough Eva had said it was Mrs. Nathan she  
ed for. At length, Sir Felix Vaine, having  
his other companions, returned to her, and  
y continued talking together of very indif-  
ent matters. The minds of both were pre-  
occupied, and there seemed less communion  
ever between them. The little they *did*  
was frequently interrupted by the loud  
es of Mrs. Nathan's voice—that lady per-  
ng that a part of the ice Stuart had pointed  
as insecure was perfectly safe, and that she  
ld go upon it. Sir Felix smiled sarcasti-  
y at their altercation, and suggested that

the good lady, who seemed so anxious to drown, had probably mistaken *aqua-vita* for *aqua-pura* that morning; but Eva paid no attention to his remarks. She was just wondering how far the patience or politeness of a young man to a stout elderly lady, his mother's guest, could be expected to go, when a loud scream startled her, and looking up she saw Stuart struggling among broken masses of ice, and Mrs. Nathan shrieking so loudly as to rouse the echoes of the wooded hills. He was waddling desperately from the place of danger on all fours, having, of course, fallen head first on the ice, when, notwithstanding her own danger, she attempted to make a race for it to the bank.

Fatigued with her childish folly, and bored with impatience to rejoin his former companion, Stuart, in a moment of irritation, endeavored to convince her that the ice was not strong enough to bear their weight on the place he had pointed out, had himself advanced

intending, with a stick he had procured, to make a hole, for the purpose of convincing the incredulous lady that he was right; but by some means or other he had gone a few steps too far. Crack, crack, went the ice around him, and in a moment he was struggling in the water, with his back towards the terrified spectators.

The ice once broken, gave way on all sides; the water spread over the floating parts, and a strong current that ran through this portion of the deep mere (now more rapid and powerful from its pent-up state) every moment lessened the chances of his escape. It was quite clear, too, that Stuart was not an expert swimmer; and sinking, rising, and struggling amid the broken ice, it was horribly evident, that in another minute he would be sucked by the current under the frozen surface of the mere.

The instant that Eva saw the accident, she rushed to the lake, and her little foot was already on the frozen snow at its edge, when a

sudden giddiness and faintness seized her, but for Sir Felix, who had closely followed her, she would herself have fallen. Quick as lightning, however, she was again advancing. Stuart's head was still visible, and his arms stretching about in quest of something to grasp by, when Sir Felix pointed out in a few words how far the drowning man was beyond the reach of hers—the ice having given way still more than before.

Her only answer was a look of wild alarm, and "Save him! save him!" burst from her pale lips.

Quick as lightning a thought flashed through Sir Felix's mind—one of those prompt, unscrupulous advantages which the enterprising character would have exulted in, even at the sacrifice of cherished hopes and pecuniary necessities. He had been less closely allied—and bending down, he whispered a little sentence into the ear of the now sinking girl. There was no time for deliberation, and Eva knew it. She raised

ad, and her look might have changed the purpose of an assassin, so full of the heart's interest was it was—but her words were only will! I swear it! now, quick! quick!" Then Sir Felix, bounding from her side, passed with great skill over the ice, and plunged into the water, just as Stuart was disappearing, perhaps for the last time. He caught him, and the latter rallying at the touch of a living man, was soon enabled to reach the former portion of the ice, but that also with the weight of the body began to crack—for a slow thaw had all that day been secretly undermining the frost, and the solid ice split and became riven asunder. A second service of danger had to be passed through, which Sir Felix, to do him justice, accomplished with great courage and determination. They both landed safely.

Eva saw Stuart rescued, and then she tried to walk away, but the deathlike faintness had come back, and she leaned against a tree for support. Mrs. Nathan had now returned with



several persons from the grounds, and Sir Felix perceiving this, left Stuart to their care, and hastened to Eva's side. At his approach she aroused herself, and an angry flush burned on her lately pallid face.

"I am quite well, Sir Felix," she said. "Pray do not wait for me. Mr. Aylmer doubtless heard of his son's accident: go—tell him." Then seeing he did not move, the colour on her cheek deepened, and in an excited voice she exclaimed, "Go, Sir Felix, go!"

Then came those low, soft, loverlike tones, as, in the wooded solitudes of the park, he attempted to take her hand—"My Eva cannot leave you thus." The hand was taken away, and Eva proceeded towards the house, her companion keeping close by her side. Suddenly she turned towards him, and said in a tone of anguish—"Sir Felix Vaine, I shall be mad if you persist in staying with me now. I know what I have done—I have pledged myself to a man I hate and detest, but remem-

said not when it should be. And now, if you do not leave me I shall die—Sir Felix, I shall die—or go mad!”

Several persons, and among them Mr. Aylmer, were now seen advancing towards them; and Sir Felix, making a very low bow to his fair companion, left her to walk alone. All were so busy during the remainder of that eventful day in inquiring about Stuart's accident, and blessing Sir Felix as his deliverer, that Eva's excuse of a violent headache was accepted, and those who knocked at her door were content for this reason to go away unadmitted. And she spent the afternoon and evening alone.

## CHAPTER XII.

---

“ That is love  
\* \* \* \* which can resign  
Its own best happiness for one dear sake;  
\* \* \* \* —bath no part in hope,  
For hope is somewhat selfish, love is not,  
And doth prefer another to itself.”

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BUT the morrow came, and all things proceeded as usual; and a wretched morning it was, of sleet and drift, that the howling wind of the thaw swept against the walls and windows of the mansion to turn the water as the whirling flakes fell; dark patches of ground where the snow had melted made the piebald hills most forlorn; the sodden gravelled walks were shining with trickling



from the trees, and the park stream was rushing furiously in its new freedom from the ice, brown and boiling from the flooded rivulets which fed it from the valley sides; there was bleak abandonment in the misery of the scene, dreary and pitiless that it suggested nothing but melancholy truths on the certainty of death, the miseries of life, and the vanity of all human hopes.

This was the cheerful morrow that arose upon Eva Herbert, as the betrothed of Sir Felix Vaine. The struggle between her warm feelings and her deeply-rooted sense of the obligation of a vow was terrible, for Eva, by constitution disposed to devotion, and her natural capacity for veneration quickened and strengthened by a well-ordered religious education possessed moreover of a high conscientiousness, which made her regard the circumstance of Sir Felix Vaine risking his life on the faith of her words, with a weight nearly equal to that of her vow, felt that she had no

power of avoiding the dreadful ordeal which she had become bound to pass. And the thought of this change in her prospects of the future—that beautiful future, the hope of which is the only distinctive happiness of youth—the horrible idea of marrying a man she disliked, and the no less impatient torment of feeling that one who filled her whole heart, and with whom all the brightest hopes and memories of her life were inseparably united, must have his love rejected by her, just when her spirit had been exulting with passionate joy at witnessing the bestowal—those hopeless realities of her isolated state produced a tumult of bitter emotion which Eva could not control. And the consciousness, as has been said, of having no means of escaping from such a distracting doom, so paralyzed her feelings—still highly sensitive from the shock and excitement she had undergone the day before, and which the night of broken sleep and troubled dream had done very little to assuage—that she had

her throbbing forehead on the open palms of her little hands, through the delicate fingers of which the tears were stealing, and murmured to herself, after every sobbing movement of her bosom, "I wish that I could die!"

But the morning's dawn had brighter associations in the mind of Sir Felix Vaine. He was happy and triumphant, and what mattered it to him if two helpless women's hearts were bruised or broken by his means? But it is a small thing the peace of a woman's heart compared with man's pleasures and vanity; at least so Sir Felix thought, as he curled and trimmed his whiskers that morning, without one remorseful reflection, and descended to the breakfast-room, full of the most enchanting anticipations, and blessing his own ready ingenuity which had led to such a fortunate result. For Sir Felix Vaine, although it would have stung his vanity in the most sensitive point to have a wife who did not worship him, had the solid and steadfast conviction that the existence of such a

state of feeling towards himself in any woman whose passionate preference he might have had, could easily be created by him. The only difficulty in the case of Eva having been the question of time and the opportunities of intercourse; and these being now removed, he was quite as easy on the point of her affection for him, as if it had been already obtained. And if Charlotte Dacres, and her deep and now acknowledged love, for a moment crossed his mind, he dismissed it on the next, comforting himself with the remembrance that she was but one of many others whom he had thus trifled with, and who, for aught he knew to the contrary, were all, at that present instant, alive and well.

Eva did not go down to breakfast, but after taking a cup of chocolate, which to get rid of the importunities of old Janet she was compelled to drink, when all the others were assembled down stairs, she went to the library and took up a book; not indeed with mu-

intention of reading it, but to practise the difficult task of hiding the deep wretchedness that she feared her countenance would too surely betray.

She had been here only a few minutes, when the door opened, and Stuart entered. He seemed surprised at seeing her, but hastily advanced, with a look of pleasure, to her side. Eva rose too, and held out her hand. He took it eagerly, and she did not withdraw it while attempting to express her pleasure at his recovery from the shock of yesterday. A few words only had issued from her lips, when she stopped, and turned very pale.

"Dearest Miss Herbert," said he tenderly, "you are ill; sit down here." And he led her to a couch.

Eva had no more power over herself, and silently the burning tears stole down her pale cheeks, while passionate words of deep and long-cherished love fell almost unconsciously

from her anxious companion. And oh! such words from him should ever be listened to without rapture inexpressible by her! the sounds her ear so long had thirsted for should now but increase the desolation of her stricken soul! But so it was; and every more endearing term, her agitation increased, till Stuart became alarmed he knew not why, and besought her to explain the cause of her emotion. A milder light shone in her eyes as she looked into that beloved face, and said, as calmly as she could—

“ Stuart Aylmer, I pray you recal the words you have just now spoken. I dare not listen to them again. Hate me, if you will; despise me you must; nothing can signify to me. Do not ask for explanations; do not stay! *I am betrothed to another!* Nay, you must not question me—you will not, for I know you have loved me truly. Stuart, dear Stuart, Heaven bless you—”



And without another glance at the countenance now paler than her own, Eva opened the door and was gone.

And what were the thoughts and feelings of him she left standing there alone? In truth, Stuart scarcely knew, himself, so completely as he stunned and overwhelmed by the words which Eva had now spoken. It was as if some cloud had suddenly arisen and had obscured the sun of happiness that so lately shone upon them; but whence it came he had no clue to guess, and the more he thought, the more obscurity seemed to surround it all.

At length, after half an hour spent in fruitless efforts to fathom the seeming mystery, Stuart resolved to demand another interview, and he went immediately to his own room to write a note to Eva to this effect.

And in the meantime Eva herself, with a determination of not yielding at present to the grief that was breaking her heart, instead of seeking solitude again, went to the drawing-

room, where she was soon joined by  
of the family

“Oh, Eva,” said Fanny, the moment  
saw her, “I am so glad you are come.  
Have you seen Stuart? Dear Stuart  
fancy what an escape he has had! I  
dreadfully ill you look, Eva. Ah,  
it all. I am sure I should have fainted  
Nathan has been in bed ever since—  
woman! it was all her fault. But Sir  
—oh good, dear Sir Felix! you must  
to thank him, Eva; he has been so  
about you—and I declare here he comes.”

Sir Felix entered, and walked up  
to Eva. “Good morning, Miss Herbert,  
rejoiced to see you well again, but you  
pale still;” and so saying, he held  
hand, with his most insinuating smile.

Eva pretended not to notice this  
she felt she must have fainted had he  
at that moment been clasped in his arms.  
Fanny, unconscious of the torture of her



continued urging her to speak, and asking the reason of her coldness to Sir Felix.

"What have you done to offend Miss Herbert?" said she, looking very gravely in his face. "Let me be the umpire between you, and reconcile you again. Come, Sir Felix, bend your knee to this disdainful lady; and Eva, command you, smile upon Sir Felix."

Sir Felix did as he was bade, but still the moment he knelt to, raised not her eyes.

"What does this mean?" continued Fanny, beginning to think there was something mysterious in the affair. "Eva, are you not glad my brother, the brother of your own brother, has been saved? Then smile, just one tiny smile to his preserver."

Thus appealed to, Eva did look up and smile upon Sir Felix, but apparently it was not the sort of smile that lovers like to receive, for he rose, on the instant, from his kneeling position, and walked hastily to the other end of the room. And Fanny was on the point of follow-

ing, to beg an explanation of the strange scene when visitors were announced, and I saw that Lady Mostyn and her eldest daughter made their appearance.

"A melancholy day to choose for a visit," said the former, shaking hands with Isabella who had advanced to meet them; "but you see, Ginny looked so dull and miserable at home that I thought the sight of so many young friends as I knew were assembled here, would do her some good. Ginny, my love, Miss Aylmer will introduce her young friends to you. Ah, there is Miss Herbert, I presume, of whom we have heard so much?"

And Lady Mostyn whispered some comment into Eva's ear, who bowed politely, and coldly, in return, and still kept her seat; the quick-sighted girl, from the bad sense of the words whispered to herself, a poor stranger, saw at once that the mistress of Redhall was little of a gentlewoman, and less a person likely to be agreeable.

Sir Felix had left the room on the announcement of visitors.

The conversation, as is usual in morning calls when the parties are slightly acquainted, proceeded rather languidly, till Ginevra asked how they liked their guest, Sir Felix Vaine?

This, of course, elicited various replies from the different ladies. Fanny was loud in her praises, and detailed the scene on the ice; the others spoke less, but all had some word of commendation, except Charlotte Dacres and Eva. Neither of these offered any opinion on the question of the baronet's merits, and Miss Mestyn, perceiving this, soon after drew her chair closer to Eva, and smiling very sweetly, said she was rejoiced to find some one who agreed with her in her own private opinion of the gentleman in question (which by Eva's silence she presumed she did). "For," said the *nonchalante* Miss Ginny, erecting herself in her chair, "I detest Sir Felix Vaine more than I can tell you, and indeed I have good cause."

"And how has he offended you, Miss Montyn?" said Eva.

"Oh, it is a long story, and I could not tell it now," replied Ginevra; "but independent of any personal offence, I abhor his character. Mama is very fond of him though," she continued, speaking lower, "and I hardly dare say all I feel—but you do not like him, I can see that. Now do tell me why, for all the rest of the world, it seems, think him extremely fascinating."

"Really, I have not thought of studying his character," said Eva, "but——"

"Oh, I can supply any deficiency in your knowledge of that," interrupted Ginevra; "and in the first place his odious vanity makes one sick; he believes that every woman, married or single, he smiles upon, must fall in love with him—don't you call that modest?"

"Very," said Eva, mournfully; and her companion continued—

"Of course, you know he dyes his hair and whiskers?"

"They are very black," said Eva, not knowing what else to say.

"Of course," they are japanned—jet black course, but it is easy to dye them any colour. Never, that is a trifle. But, would you love it? he actually keeps a small book he calls his 'log-book') in which he writes down every favour or fancied preference he receives from a lady; and then, summing it all up, he regulates his advances and pretensions by the amount; a cool and heartless proceeding, by which he has made many gains. What do you think of *that*?"

At any other time Eva would have been much amused by the warmth with which these professions of character were related, but now they only made her heart ache the more. She did not answer, but it was not required, for she went on—

"Then, if you could see how shamefully and contemptuously he treats poor Julia, his cousin, who is really attached to

him—though how in the world she can has always puzzled me—but he thinks it thing to break a woman's heart, and boasts that many have died for him. ever he marries, his poor wife shall have sincerest prayers——”

“ Shall she ?” said Eva, almost unconsciously taking her companion's hand. Then whispering “ good by,” and telling her talkative friend that she was not very well, she stole from the room, feeling that she had heard enough for one morning of the character of her future husband. On reaching her room, Stuart's note was delivered to her. She hesitated for some minutes as to the manner in which she should answer it. Another view under the present circumstances would but make her more wretched—for what could she explain? how tell him that to save her she had sworn to marry a man she despised and now abhorred? No, it was

ible, her doom was a dreadful one—but it fixed.

he only hope she still cherished, and it was very slight one, was that Sir Felix, when he had how deeply she was attached to another, would, for very shame, release her from her unkept promise to himself. And cost what it would, she fully determined to see him, and to win him all.

For this purpose she once more descended to the library, where, as she had expected, Sir Felix was sitting. He appeared rather surprised at seeing her, but smiled a most intelligent smile, which said, as plainly as any man could say, "Ah, I thought she would outplay the tyrant long. There is no doubt, my dear, that I *am* irresistible!"

But neither the smile nor its signification was noticed by the proud girl who stood before him. Lightly he had sprung from his seat, and endeavoured to lead her to a chair, but she preferred standing, and Sir Felix began

pouring forth a torrent of love and admiration mingled with earnest entreaties to know he might communicate the hopes she had graciously given him, to her guardian.

“Sir Felix,” replied Eva, with a firmness which surprised herself, “I have been taught to regard a vow as a sacred thing, and to you shall so be held, if after what I am about to tell you, you still persist in your cruel and unmanly claim. You once asked me when I first declined the honour of your love if I loved anybody else. I now answer you that I do; with my whole heart and soul. Eva blushed at her own warmth, though she could not control it) I am devoted to him whom I knew and loved even as a child, and who I shall ever love, even if you force me to become your wife.” Her eyes grew bright and her cheek more flushed as she continued, “You shall hear all, Sir Felix, if you do not already guess it—the man whose life you required a bribe to save, he it is who is de-



to me than the air I breathe—ay, dear as my own soul!”

She paused from extreme excitement, and Sir Felix delayed not to answer.

“My sweet Miss Herbert, I regret that you should think so poorly of my love for you, as to imagine that anything in the world could make me waive my sacred claim to your beloved hand. Nay, dearest Eva, listen to me one moment: my deep devotion shall win your love at length, my one eternal thought shall be for your happiness; I will anticipate your every wish, watch your every look, and, if it be necessary, lay down my life itself for your dear sake.”

“Do not,” replied Eva impatiently, “insult my reason, Sir Felix, by folly such as this. Your love is hateful to me, and I scruple not to say it.”

For a instant Sir Felix Vaine’s eyes flashed fire. “Nay, then,” he said, “I will annoy you with it no more; but remember, we both

regard a vow as a sacred thing. T  
you free, you are my promised bride  
love not delays in these matters.  
your permission to speak to your guar  
the subject this evening?"

"No, Sir Felix," Eva exclaimed  
sionately, so greatly had her feelings  
wrought upon; "no, you have not  
have time."

"Then," replied Sir Felix, excited  
turn, and his vanity deeply stung by  
evident contempt with which he was  
"then, fair lady, I must act without  
quiescence, and it rests with you whet  
betray the peculiarities of our engagem  
not. To me it would matter very little  
might, methinks, be rather offensive to  
lady's delicacy, were it known that her  
one man was so great, that she agreed t  
his rival as the price of saving the life  
more favoured lover."

"And can you, Sir Felix," she ex

with increased indignation, "really intend to persist in this claim, when I have told you that I do not, and never can, love you?"

"That you do not love me *now*, Miss Herbert, is a matter of indifference to me," replied Sir Felix, goaded back upon his effrontery; "but that you will one day love me, and remember this scene with surprise and amusement at your present infatuation, I cannot permit myself to doubt. And now, as you look somewhat paler than usual, I would counsel your taking a little repose till dinner-time. When we meet in the drawing-room in the evening, I hope to be able to communicate to you your guardian's consent to our union."

Eva had no strength to say more; and thus they parted.

It will not be doubted that the scene just related, was painful in the extreme to Eva Herbert. She was placed in a situation that no previous education or experience could possibly have prepared her for; and she acted

as any woman, proud and sensitive, would have done. She writhed under the chains that bound her, and scrupled not to show that she did so; for although she felt that her first duty now was to endeavour to think more favourably of her future husband, still, when in the presence of Sir Felix, the haughtiness of her nature *would* betray itself, creating, by her restrained expression of it, yet further barriers between them. But when alone again, Eva sighed and reflect that all this pride and scorn was like the impatient fluttering of a prisoned bird, and that it did nothing to lessen the horror of her situation. No, she must, since there was no escape, try with her whole heart to love the man she had so rashly promised to marry.

And yet Eva now asked herself again and again, *was* it rashly done? was not the life of Stuart Aylmer far dearer to her than her earthly happiness; and having, as she believed, preserved this precious life by the sacrifice of herself, should she render the sacrifice of

, by showing that she was wretched, and lengthening his regrets, and creating in mind doubts and suspicions which she could remove?"

, this were a most unworthy part; and resolved that it should not be hers; cost it would, she fully determined to hide misery, that *his* happiness might not be for wrecked whose life her love had saved. "I will soon forget me if he thinks I love Sir," she said to herself, "and it will be far thus."

and gradually her spirit became more tranquil, and the feverish throbbing of her temples subsided for the time; for in the devotion of self, a woman, a good, true woman, feels she is fulfilling her mission; and when the mind has the courage boldly and fully to contemplate this destiny, it loses much of its darkness, and a halo, though it may be a false one, begins insensibly to surround and illumine it.



Eva roused herself at length to write the following note to Stuart, in answer to his letter.

“ In refusing your request for another view, believe me, I have judged wisely both. Forgive my manner this morning; I scarcely knew what I said. I know you will not accuse me of caprice and coquetry, and I am quite unable to explain my conduct. I have kind sentiments towards me, I thank you deeply, but a sister's love is all I can return. All this will appear inexplicable to you, but one thing is clear; and that is, it is your duty to forget me, and mine of none other than my future husband. I have every wish and prayer for your happiness and welfare,

“ Believe me,

“ Sincerely yours,

EVA HERBERT

Without trusting herself to read over these necessary words, so foreign to her

passionate feelings, Eva sealed and sent the letter. She did not go down to dinner, for she felt it would be too embarrassing to see Stuart so soon, and she believed that when he knew to whom she was engaged, he would leave his father's house.

The long hours crept lazily by, and none of the party below broke in upon her solitude; for Ginevra Mostyn, whom they had all taken a fancy to, had been prevailed on to stay for a few days with them, and thus Eva was almost unmissed. But the dinner was over, and lights had been brought into her room, when a quick step followed them, and Fanny was seated by her side.

"Now tell me, Eva," she said, "why you look so pale, and stay so long alone; and what was the meaning of your proud manner to Sir Felix this morning?"

"Fanny," replied her friend, with a desperate effort, "I am engaged to Sir Felix Vaine!"

Fanny started from her chair, and looked a moment scornfully incredulous; then Eva's eyes were filled with tears, she threw her arms round her neck, and after a short silence, burst out, "Poor Stuart!"



### CHAPTER XIII.

---

"Oh, I have fed upon this wo already,  
And now excess of it will make me surfeit."

---

SIR FELIX kept his promise, and the moment he found himself alone with Mr. Aylmer after dinner (Stuart having followed the ladies) he opened the subject in which he was so interested, and formally asked his host's consent to his marriage with his ward, declaring at the same time he had obtained that of the lady herself. For an instant Mr. Aylmer fancied his guest had drank too freely, and looked in his face inquiringly. Sir Felix readily divined his thoughts, and replied, with his most

insinuating smile—"My dear Sir, I am much surprised at your astonishment, and for this I was furnished. It is not my presumption in placing my hand in Miss Herbert's hand that surprises you greatly, as her acceptance of my homage does me," continued Sir Felix, seeing that Mr. Aylmer was about to interrupt him, "pardon me, my very kind sir. You have observed that I have observed, a sort of aversion in the fair ward's manner towards myself. I have observed, dear Mr. Aylmer, although some may think me too senior, you have not, I imagine, mentioned to mankind the subject of your particular interest as I have done. It is the only thing that has occupied myself on, and, vanity apart, I may say I have not without reason. Oh, I could—if I had your taste—amuse you with more anecdotes respecting the weaker but more interesting sex, than ever were, or perhaps ever published. But this digression is idle. I wished to convince you that not every man who frowns, bears an angry heart towards

having accomplished my purpose I will return——”

“Your pardon now, Sir Felix Vaine,” interrupted Mr. Aylmer, somewhat coldly. “You have certainly expressed your own opinions, but that is all I have been able to glean from your observations. You have taken upon yourself to imagine a surprise for me, which you refused me an opportunity of expressing; and you have answered this assumed astonishment by a panegyric on your own knowledge of women. Now all this, Sir Felix, was perfectly unnecessary; I am simply the guardian of Miss Herbert’s fortune, not of her affections; and if these are fixed upon you, although I must observe the engagement seems rather premature, I can have no right to object. Miss Herbert is very young, too young, in my opinion, to marry at present; but on this point I can converse with her when she thinks fit to name the subject to me!”

Now Sir Felix was not exactly disappointed

at the reception his proposals met with, because he had expected nothing better; but the idea of a long delay, which Mr. Aylmer's last words seemed to threaten, was extremely distasteful to him, and for a moment he knew not what reply to make.

"Excuse me," at length he said, with a smile which was intended to be particularly winning, "but I must entreat you, Mr. Aylmer, to have some little consideration for my lover's feelings. It is hardly fair, I think, to doom me to a long engagement, which you are mentioning the matter in the way you suggest, to Miss Herbert, will not fail to do so for you must be aware, my dear sir, that however strongly a lady may be attached to me (and I *do* flatter myself your lovely wife's feelings are not cold towards me) and disposed to agree in her lover's wishes for a speedy union—womanly delicacy would compel me not to accede to any request for a delay that my parent or guardian should urge. Think

a moment of this, my good sir, and be not too hard upon us."

"Fear not, Sir Felix," said Mr. Aylmer, "that I shall use any undue influence with Miss Herbert. The matter is in her hands."

Then with an involuntary sigh, he rose, and his guest followed him to the drawing-room.

It will doubtless appear to the reader that Sir Felix Vaine in all this matter acted a most unworthy and villanous part, but one word, one small word in palliation of his conduct, must in justice be said for him.

He had, on first seeing Eva Herbert, ardently and passionately admired her, and this admiration, when he became domesticated under the same roof, soon ripened into love, as true and sincere as he was capable of feeling. Accustomed from his boyhood to have his every wish indulged, his every desire granted, spoiled by flattery and indulgence, he had at last learned to consider himself and his own attractions omnipotent, and with this had grown

a jealousy of all other men, and a singular hatred towards any who he saw preferred himself—though at the same time he fully believed it was in his own power (if he chose to take the trouble) to supplant them. And never had he felt so earnest a desire to do this as when he was first refused by Eva Herbert. From that moment he hated Stuart Aylmer, and determined that he at least should never enjoy what was denied to himself. How he would have accomplished his purpose of separating the lovers but for the fortunate scene on the ice, it is impossible to guess. Even with Charlotte Daeres' assistance, he might have found it more difficult than he imagined, but his task was unexpectedly smoothed for him, and Sir Felix was a happy man, doubtless happy, because he doubted not, as he saw himself, eventually to win Eva to return his love. On this point he was very sanguine and therefore ill-prepared for the painful scene in the library, when her (perhaps too harsh



expressed) contempt and indignation roused and excited the worst feelings of his nature, wounding so severely his self-love—that arling passion of his soul. And so he gave her at length scorn for scorn, and spoke, not as his heart, but as his tortured vanity dictated.

For all this, he loved and admired her still, and he loved her fortune too, and had no intention of relinquishing either. But before his conversation with Mr. Aylmer, he wrote her a letter full of the most humble petitions for pardon, for not having better endured her taunts that morning, excusing all his conduct on the plea of ardent love, entreating her pity and forbearance, and promising for the future the most devoted affection and respect that ever man paid to woman. He ended by imploring her not to delay his happiness too long, for none, he protested, could he now enjoy, till he called her his own.

But it is time now to return to one, with whom it is hoped the reader's sympathies are

more engaged. In the course of that evening Mr. Aylmer called his son into the library, related to him his conversation with the guest.

If anything could have increased Stuart's despair after receiving Eva's cold and unfavourable note, it was this, to find that his rescuer was the man who had saved his life. He took his father's hand, but he did not speak.

"My dear boy," said Mr. Aylmer, "I do not know your secret, and I believed that that was why you loved you. There is some mystery here—do nothing hastily, Stuart. Let me talk to you first, my dear boy."

"Not for worlds, my dear father," said his son eagerly, "if it is to ask an explanation from Miss Herbert. What mystery can there be? It is enough that she protects my sister Vaine. Oh that it had been any other!" He continued, his eye brightening strangely at the moment. "But, father, he saved my sister. God grant that she may be happy with him."



“And you, Stuart, what are your plans?”  
said his father mournfully.

“To travel again,” said the young man, endeavouring to speak calmly. “I could not remain here. To-morrow morning I shall leave.”

“So soon, so very soon!” exclaimed the old man. “Ah, how fast my visions of peace and happiness to be enjoyed in my native England, are fading away. And now you, my dear boy, are again to become a wanderer, and a weight on my heart, Stuart, that I have never felt before, at the thoughts of this separation. I am an old man, and in my children were all my hopes centred.—But Heaven’s will be done,” continued he, resting his head on his clasped hands, “I do ill to murmur!”

“My father, my kind, good father, say but one word, and I will never leave you; rather would I stay and endure seeing her devoted to, and loved by another, than be the means, by rashly flying from that, of causing you one moment’s pain.”

"Not so, Stuart," replied the father, now rising, "enough of this weakness. My boy, I should suffer ten-fold more by witnessing your dejection. No, go and seek happiness elsewhere, and take with you a father's warmest blessing."

It was finally arranged between them that, except to his mother, Stuart should not communicate his intention of going abroad. Sudden business would account to the others for his leaving them so abruptly, and thus the pain of saying "farewell" be spared. Indeed it was judged best that they should know nothing of his going till he was gone; and all he had now to do was to see his mother, and without explaining why, mention the probability of his not returning home for a year or two.

For this purpose, he sought her in her room before she had retired to rest. Mrs. Aylmer heard him in exceeding surprise, and much displeasure, for her mind, ever prone to suspicion, instantly suggested, as the motive of his quitting

England, a wish to see Alice again ; but this she forebore to express, and only said—  
Really, Stuart, I never knew such a restless disposition as yours ; I don't believe there is any business that might not be put off for a few months, when we shall all go to London : but your plan of going abroad again is quite ridiculous. However, I know I have no influence over you, so I will not waste my time by talking about it. By the by, if you go to Paris, I suppose you must call on your cousin Alice Morton, and pray tell her, that directly her foreign friend is recovered, I shall expect her to return to our protection. You had better not see her too often, because it might injure her, poor thing. You understand, Stuart?"

Stuart did not exactly understand, but he was in no mood to prolong the conversation by asking for an explanation. And so he took his mother's hand, and was about to say good by, when she again interrupted him.

"Oh, and Stuart, don't forget to see Clara if you go by the way of Belgium where they are at present; and remind her of the letter I wrote to her about—twelve years of the time Brussels. I shall want it when we go to court in the spring with Herbert."

"Well good by, my dear mother. I can not depend on my seeing Clara if I go Belgium."

"Good by, Stuart; I shall look out for you while you are away, and don't engage yourself to any one abroad. And Stuart," she continued yawning, "don't let me awaken me again in the morning. These dream scenes harass my feelings terribly, and I am too nervous to endure them. I am never well all day, if I go away."

## CHAPTER XIV.

---

"She dreams on him that has forgot her love."

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It is scarcely necessary to state that Eva told no more to Fanny concerning her situation with Sir Felix Vaine, than that mentioned in the previous chapter; and Fanny, though she wondered much and wept a little at the strange communication, asked no further questions. Some months before, she would in all probability have exhibited greater curiosity, nor have rested till the truth was discovered, but her own troubles had taught her that there are some things too sacred for friendship's ear, some wounds too sensitive for even friendship's

touch; and so she was discreet and kind enough to sympathize with her friend, without knowing why she was called upon to do so. And sympathy thus given, was sweet and soothing to the excited mind of her friend, who received it; and when, at Eva's own request, she was once more left alone, her tears were less bitter, and her despondency less than they had hitherto been. But the trial that night were not yet over.

Sir Felix had felt that for many reasons it would be for his interest, that the engagement between himself and Miss Herbert should as soon as possible be publicly known. His first care had been to send an announcement of it to the London newspapers, and he also made his servant, a fellow nearly as shrewd and as sufficient as himself, spread the intelligence among the household at Elmcourt, so that the lady that evening heard the astonishing news from her maid, while receiving the assistance of the latter in her toilette duties.

It may be not uninteresting to the reader to look in upon some of them, and notice the different sensations with which the communication was listened to.

And first shall be displayed Mrs. Aylmer herself, who (having parted from Stuart) called Fanchette, her French waiting-woman, to un- dress her.

"*Ah, madame,*" chirped the little soubrette, "what joy! *quel plaisir!* that we have a wedding at last—*nous étions si triste.* And monsieur, *ah Dieu! qu'il est bien!*"

"Is the girl mad?" said the lady, half raising herself from her fauteuil. "Of what marriage and what monsieur are you speaking, Fanchette?"

"Ah, madame, it is no secret: *tout le monde le sait.* Cette belle Miss Herbert et Sir Felix Vaine qui vont se marier. Grand Dieu! qu'il est joli garçon! elle sera bien heureuse, cette demoiselle! à"

"What I understand from your strange jar-

gon," said Mrs. Aylmer pettishly, "is that you have heard that Miss Herbert is to be married to Sir Felix Vaine—am I right?"

"*Mais oui, sans doute*, certainly you are right madame; do not every one down stairs speak of nothing else—Sair Felix Vaine's own man tell us all."

"There, hold your tongue, girl, I don't believe a word of it—nevertheless, when you undress Miss Aylmer, you may tell her what you have heard. And now I have done with you—go!"

Fanchette faithfully obeyed her mistress's injunctions by repeating her tale to Isabel, who exhibited less incredulity than her worthy parent.

"Engaged, going to be married, did you say, Fanchette?" and not even come out yet! Well, *tant mieux*; I hope sincerely it may be true. I was sure she would take the first man that offered, and that Sir Felix is a perfect fool.—But, Fanchette, before you go, as I see you



...e dying to do, to spread this wonderful news,  
...ll me if you went to the post-office to-day?"

"*Mais oui, Mademoiselle*—there was no  
...tter."

"Are you sure you went, Fanchette?"

"*Si Mademoiselle, ne me trouve pas digne de  
...nfiance*"—began the offended maid.

"*C'est assez, chère Fanchette, mais soyez  
...tre d'y aller demain.*"

And now Fanchette had only to attend to  
...anny, who having heard the news before,  
...ceived it very coldly, and quickly dismissed  
...e loquacious Frenchwoman.

In the meantime the English abigail was  
...qually communicative to Miss Stanley and  
...harlotte Dacres, at whose toilettes it was her  
...uty to assist. The latter only asked whence  
...he derived her information, and being an-  
...wered, wished her attendant good night, telling  
...er she required her no longer. The former  
...sked no questions, but went straight to Eva's

room, where the reader must be kind enough, for a few minutes, to accompany her.

She found the unhappy girl sitting before the fire, watching in melancholy abstraction its decaying embers. At the sound of footsteps, Eva turned slowly round, and Miss Stanley was startled at the exceeding paleness of her countenance.

"I had come," she said, "to offer my congratulations to the future bride of Sir Felix Vaine, but it seems that condolences would be more in character. What is the meaning of all this, Eva? They say you are to be married to Sir Felix, and yet I know—nay, you must have done with blushes now—I know that you love Stuart Aylmer."

"Miss Stanley," replied Eva, in a colder tone than she had ever before spoken to one who she knew, though perhaps rather too curious, was a warm and true friend, "Miss Stanley, I once told you that whenever I required a confidant, you should be the one

sen. That time is not yet come. I assure you I have no confession to make." As she spoke, she rang the bell for her to undress her, which was a signal to Stanley that her presence was not required; and so, offended and distressed, she left the room, and the old and faithful nurse entered.

To her, Eva had no power of keeping up the character of composure she had assumed; when Janet, with tears in her eyes, begged her young mistress not to look so angry at her, Eva threw her arms round the woman's neck, and wept upon her bosom. It was there as a child she had often wiped her early griefs away; there she had turned her loving father's loss; there, too, tears had flowed again when he, the good and holy, her second parent, was taken from her.

And here finally she wept the passing away of all those hopes which had so brightened the dull world, that while they lasted,

it had seemed a very Eden to her. And the faithful nurse, as on former occasions, wiped the burning tears away—but she had no words of comfort to whisper to her idol now.

Although Janet comprehended as little of her young lady's situation with Sir Felix, as the rest, she knew perhaps better than any, how long, how very long, Eva had loved another, and with a delicacy rarely seen in one of her education, she did not even name that loved one now. But when the tears were for the moment dried, she took a note from her pocket, and presenting it to Eva, busied herself in a distant part of the room.

This was from Sir Felix, and written shortly after his interview with Mr. Aylmer, telling her the purport of that conversation, and expressing his intention of leaving Derbyshire the following day.

To account for this, it must be told that Sir Felix, building confidently on the effect which the announcement of his approaching marriage

with one of the richest heiresses of the day would produce in relation to society, money-lenders, creditors, and everything of that sort which makes London delightful, had determined to enjoy himself there for a short time, partly because his spirit yearned for new scenes, and partly because he saw that his suit for the present was more likely to prosper by his absence than by any other means.

As Eva read the note, a feeling of deep thankfulness pervaded her heart. He was going, then; at least for a few weeks she was free, and during that time she would strive and pray to be enabled to conquer her attachment to Stuart, and to look with less dislike on the man who was to be her husband. At any rate he was going now, and there was much comfort in this.

Janet was soon dismissed, and again Eva's unfettered thoughts were wandering to scenes long past; again in distinct colouring the quiet parsonage of her happy youth rose before her,

the green hills and the shady valleys, and above all, her own sweet glen, where, side by side with the rapid growth of her bright imaginings, had sprung an image that had so twined around them and her heart, that it seemed as if death only could disentangle them again—and yet that now it were deep sin to dwell on as of yore.

“Then surely life,” thought Eva in the bitterness of the moment, “but mocks us with visions that cannot be realized. True must be the doctrine that human beings are the victims of circumstance, and not the rulers of their own destiny.”

And stricken indeed must be that heart, which ere twenty summers have warmed its pulses, begins to philosophize on the mystery of mortal life!” But Eva’s meditations were again disturbed by a low, rapid knocking at her door.

“Come in,” she said; and scarcely were the words spoken when a figure so pale and corpse-

she stood before her, that it was some moments  
before, in the intruder, she recognised Charlotte  
Lacres.

"You are alone?" said the latter calmly;  
and being answered in the affirmative, she ad-  
vanced to where Eva sat, who invited her to  
take a seat too; but Charlotte declined, and  
stood gazing fixedly at her companion.

The latter in some surprise asked if she had  
anything to say to her, and then Charlotte  
spoke.

"Eva Herbert, they have told me you are  
engaged to marry Sir Felix Vaine. Nay, it is  
an impertinent curiosity that prompts me to  
question you in this matter. Tell me," she  
continued, "and truly, as you hope for peace  
or happiness hereafter—tell me, does he  
love you?"

There was a deep and startling earnestness in  
Charlotte's manner, that to Eva (over whose  
face flashed something like the truth) excited  
a peremptory tone, and she replied unhesita-

tingly, "He has told me so, and I have no reason to doubt him."

"No reason to doubt him! no reason to doubt Sir Felix Vaine! Oh wo, wo to you, Eva Herbert, beautiful as you are; wo, eternal wo to all who trust the falsest and most hollow heart that ever beat in human breast. But I came not here to-night to rant like the heroine of some old tragedy; my uncomely features would ill-befit a part like that; but tell me yet once again—*swear* to me, that the man you are engaged to, loves you."

"I cannot swear it, Charlotte," said Eva, deeply distressed by this scene; "I only say he has assured me it is so; but why do you ask so anxiously? have *you* any claims on his affections?"

"Claims, Eva! what claims has any woman on a man? Oh no, fear not that I have any claims on your future husband.—And so he loves you; calls you his own Eva, whispers soft and gentle words—you do not blush, but



your nature is so cold. Well, it matters not ; as his wife it must soon have become so, were it now warm as Etna's fires.—See, I am growing poetical, I shall be able to sing my own dirge at last, the dirge of the unloved one ! But, good night, Miss Herbert, I have kept you too long from your happy dreams.”

Then suddenly dropping the sarcastic tone in which her previous words had been uttered, she said, with mournful feeling,

“ And yet, and yet, if you told me you loved him not, Eva, as I have a woman's heart, I should weep for *him* ! My mind is wandering strangely, but you will not betray my weakness. Is there on earth a misfortune so great as the capacity for loving as I have done ?—See,” cried the still excited girl, pointing to the window from which the curtain was partially undrawn, “ the moon is fading now ; I have looked upon its pale brightness for many nights, and I said to myself, I will not watch its setting, but if by accident my eyes are turned

that way while its last beams are disappearing, then I will receive it as an omen of my own fate, and that my little all of happiness will fade for ever, at the same time. There now, it is fainter—fainter, lower, and lower, still!—And now there is no moon or star in all the dim sky!”

With these words, Charlotte tremblingly and nervously opened the door, and the next moment had disappeared. The reader need scarcely be told whether Eva's dreams this night were happy ones.

## CHAPTER XVI.

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"A good sort of good-for-nothing sort of man."

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THE winter months had passed, and it was about the beginning of April, when Sir Marmaduke and Lady Digby sat together in a large, but rather meanly furnished apartment of the hotel de Napoleon at Brussels, and that the following conversation took place.

"Do me the favour, Marmaduke, to pull down that blind—I cannot bear such a glaring light," said the lady to her husband.

"My love," replied Sir Marmaduke, without looking up from a book he held in his hand, "I

could not see to read this small print, if all  
blinds were down. and I hate a dark room

"I should imagine my eyes were of more  
importance than a stupid, prosy review  
like your *Chronicle* so *much*," sneered the yo-  
wife. and then she said again, "the blind  
within reach of your hand. Sir Marmaduke

"But Clara really——"

Clara replied only by ringing a small bell  
that stood on a table near her. "Clara,"  
she said, as a smart French servant entered,  
"pull down the blind of that window, but  
let Sir Marmaduke there."

The order was obeyed, and Clara and  
husband were again alone.

"I hate the fatigue of arguing," said  
wife, closing her eyes, and sinking back on  
sofa.

The husband sighed heavily, and laid  
his back.

"Pray, Marmaduke," continued Clara,  
deavour not to sigh in that ridiculous

on all occasions—it is quite disgusting. I know you are extremely dissatisfied with your lot, and, I promise you, I am not too well pleased with mine; but you see, *mon cher*, we can neither of us mend it. Are you not going out to-day and by?”

“Yes—can I do anything for your ladyship?”

“Thank you, you are very polite this morning. As we shall soon be going to England, I think you may as well select some little presents for my sisters and mama.”

“My love,” said Sir Marmaduke, in real alarm, “had we not better *wait*?”

“Oh, exactly, I understand—wait till my thirty thousand pounds make their appearance; very well, as you please; our chances of getting them are really so *little* doubtful, that I am of opinion we should be wise to make everything dependent on its arrival.”

“You mistake me, Lady Digby,” replied the husband pompously; “with *my* estate a

paltry thirty thousand pounds can signify very little: I only meant——”

“ There, never mind what you meant, Marmaduke. I am sure your bitterest enemy would never accuse you of meaning anything at all. But upon my word, I can't talk; so if you are not going out you had better get to your pocket or something of that sort.”

“ I *am* going out, Clara, to make arrangements for our journey to Naples. I think the cheapest way would——”

“ For pity's sake, Marmaduke,” again interrupted his wife, “ keep your economical calculations to yourself; for I assure you they are perfectly uninteresting to me. But before you go, oblige me by handing me that book with the green cover—no! not that; the other if you please.”

As Sir Marmaduke obeyed, he looked at the title. “ Are you aware, Clara,” he said, “ that this is the book, some one was saying the other day, that no lady ever thought of reading

It must have been sent from the library in mistake."

Clara now laughed in earnest. "My dear, good, paltry, primitive husband, you surely were meant for the pastoral ages; such virtue and simplicity are far too rare and refined for the present era."

Sir Marmaduke slightly shrugged his shoulders, and then left his lady to her interesting and edifying studies.

Apparently, however, these were less absorbing than she had anticipated, for in ten minutes the book was thrown aside, and Clara, drawing a writing table and desk to the sofa, completed, in about half an hour, the following letter to her sister Isabel:—

"CHERE BEL,

"You never scold me for not writing to you, and so I am now going to reward your forbearance—if I can keep my eyes open long enough to complete a letter. And the first

thing that suggests itself as necessary to be written down is this—Don't be in a hurry to marry. Of course I have gained the right, by my experience, of advising others, even my elder sister ; and you will not grudge me this meagre privilege when I tell you that it is the only thing I have gained by my silly marriage. I absolutely blush for myself, Bel, when I reflect on the folly I have been guilty of, in sacrificing myself to a man *sans esprit, bête à faire frémir ; tel que mon pauvre Marmaduke*.

“ And now comes part the second of my advice. Endeavour not to fall into the ridiculous mistake of thinking that because a man calls you an angel and all that, he must necessarily possess great mental capacity. *Voilà mon erreur funeste!* and surely I ought to have known better, educated in France too ! But pass we that, and proceed to things present. To think, Bel, that all my ambition, all my hopes, have ended in my becoming the wife



of a mere stupid country baronet, with an estate worth not more than twelve hundred a year, although report swells it to about five thousand, and no hopes of ever becoming richer. This is so disgusting—and, papa, I hear, is as cross as ever. Well, it can't last long, for the strength of Hercules and the patience of Job combined would never stand out many more months such a siege of ennui and weariness as I have endured for the last seven.

"Marmaduke is something *more* than a fool, for he believes himself a genius; but bad as all this is, I could just manage to bear it, if he would take me more into society; but I declare I never see a creature besides hotel-keepers and their wives. My beauty is fading too, I fear, though what matter? Marmaduke is domestic. *Figurez vous chère petite*, a stupid, domestic husband always at one's elbow. The first thing I look for now, on entering a new place, is the lunatic asylum, for to such a retreat I anticipate being conducted before I leave

the town. My sole amusement is in trying to put my sole companion in a passion—but yet I have not succeeded in this laudable attempt. He *must* hate me, but he never loses his temper. Poor Marmaduke! with a different wife he might have got on very well, for he is certainly good-tempered; but I learnt first to despise him, when I discovered that he was *mean*, horribly, graspingly mean. His thoughts by day, and his dreams by night, are of the thirty thousand pounds he expected with me. I verily believe, if he knew how to set about it, he would sell himself to a certain elderly gentleman for a few thousands. To save money we stay abroad—to save money we never go into society—in fact, to save money Sir Marmaduke Digby lives and breathes. And then he is so simple, so primitive in his ideas; I have laughed heartily this morning almost the first time since my marriage, at a specimen of his innocence. Just conceive, I thought, because he saw a book on the t

that some old French lady, whom we accidentally became acquainted with, had said was too bad to be read, that it must have been sent from the library in mistake. Of course I had obtained the work immediately after, and in consequence of her tirade against it.

"Well, poor Marmaduke! he really deserved a better wife—and yet I liked him, really half-loved him once; but who could stand meanness and stupidity combined in a man?

"Oh, I am positively dying to see Eva Herbert's intended; Stuart didn't seem to like him, but of course that speaks more for his attractions—men never like those who are preferred to themselves. We are going to stay a few weeks with Alice Norton. What luck that girl has had! I suppose she will marry Stuart; there was an old flirtation, I fancy, between them. Well, poor me! I am certainly the unfortunate one of the family. But I hear the heavy, pompous tread of my beloved, so with

a great deal of love—for I have no one  
bestow mine on—

“ Believe me,

“ Your affectionate but despairing

“ (

“ P. S. Of course this letter is strictly  
confidential—that is to say, you are to  
part of it to any one but mama, who I  
as one of us.”

## CHAPTER XVII.

---

“ Yet nature's beauty, its eternal rest,  
Its certain springs that cheat not hoping hearts,  
But bring fresh welcome each successive year ;  
All this contents us not, we must have more—  
We must have *human love* ! ”

---

STUART AYLMER had passed the last few months in Belgium, where he had seen his sister Clara and her husband, and formed his own opinion respecting their domestic happiness. He was now on his journey to Italy, for the express purpose of visiting his cousin Alice, no longer the poor unfriended orphan, but the possessor of wealth and station, the owner of all those



fair lands and domains that to their mistress had given so little pride or pleasure for she, the young and heavily-stricken, and the pure-minded Nina, was gone to the dwellings of peace; her heart had rest, and the friend whose ceaseless tenderness and self-denying kindness had soothed her dying moments, became the inheritor of her wealth. Alice was far from wise, thus, for Nina had communicated her intentions immediately before her death, but her strances were vain. Nina had no near relatives — to her husband's aunt she bequeathed a handsome annuity, and the rest she had a right to dispose of in any way she pleased. And thus the position of Alice was greatly changed.

She had paid one short visit to England after the Signora's death; received the congratulations of her cousins and then returned to her own beautiful home in Naples, where they had promised to visit her during

suing summer. But it was only the beginning of spring now, and Alice had no society save that of Madame de Rosel, who had willingly consented to continue to reside with her, as she had done with her nephew's widow.

It was on a warm sunny day that the young girl was sitting alone in the little grotto, to which the reader has before been introduced. Modest flowers of England had been carefully trained to grow around it, and they were all blooming now; but the most profuse and luxuriant was the jessamine—a plant which Alice remembered had been a favourite with her cousin Stuart—and she had coaxed and trained it into greater beauty than the rest, for she knew that in a few days she should see him once again. And her heart beat gladly with the dreams of love and hope.

And who can blame her, if she smiled at length? for her whole life had hitherto been one scene of weeping. Deeply had she mourned the death of her warm-hearted and generous

friend, and little consolation was there of vineyards and palaces for the loneliness and affection. But Alice was young, and the young cannot weary, and so on this day, as she sat alone in her former grotto, and thought of the bride that she imagined was opening her eyes, the long-mourning Alice felt real consolation in her heart.

She had heard when she went to Eva's engagement to Sir Felix Vain that the only fear of a rival she had ever removed. And he would come now to the worshipped one, and tell her all his love, she might pour out her whole soul, while the wretchedness of the former would pass away and be forgotten like a dream. And oh! how very bright the future seemed now, how fair the scented flowers, the song of the birds how thrilling and beautiful, and all the earth how beautiful!

And Alice rose and walked round



and spacious gardens; and planned, as she walked and mused, new changes here, and new improvements there, when he, the centre round which all her thoughts revolved, should come and admire them too. Without companionship, no state or splendour, especially to the young, can give pleasure long, and Alice had felt this acutely; for between herself and the good Frenchwoman, who however performed her own duties worthily, there existed little communion; so that day by day the lonely girl had yearned more and more for some one to join her in all she planned and executed—for some one to feel a kindred interest in her and hers—for some one to fill that void which Nina's death had made in her heart.

But about a week previous to the day on which she has been again presented to the reader, Alice had heard that Stuart had left Belgium for the purpose of visiting her, and everything else was forgotten in the one absorbing anticipation of his coming. Clara and her husband

were soon to follow, and take up their abode for some time at the villa, and thus Alice believed that Stuart's constant society would be secured to her; and she was happy, perhaps for the first time in her life—perfectly, deliciously happy! Then, as the soft breeze blew over her delicate cheek, wafting the perfume of fragrant shrubs and flowers, and the smooth velvet grass she trod on yielded gently to the touch of her light foot, while the bright sun looked down and smiled upon her, she walked on, as in a dream of pure delight, forgetting that the world was a world of care and suffering.

And surely such moments as these are worth living for; surely none who have once enjoyed them can say (whatever may have been their after sufferings) "I have had no happiness in life." Even when the radiant halo of romance, that youth and an ardent imagination cast over the beauty of existence, has been torn aside by age, or a too rude contact with the cares and trials of real life; even then it is sometimes

meet to think that such things were, and to look forward to that time when youth shall be renewed, and those feelings which make youth lovely abide with us eternally.

Alice lingered long in the garden, and her cheek was a shade paler when she returned to the house; but the light of happiness shone still in those pure, blue eyes, that joy made beautiful. And the succeeding days passed away at length, though they seemed more tedious than they should have been, and the morning came, clothed in the brightest sunbeams, on which Alice expected to see and welcome Stuart Aylmer.

At an early hour she bent her steps to the grotto, for thither she had given orders when Stuart came he should be directed; and her heart throbbed wildly—but oh, how joyously too—as she listened tremblingly and breathlessly for every sound. So beautiful, still, and motionless she seemed, as she sat there alone in her plain, deep mourning-

dress, that she might at a first glance have been mistaken for the spirit of some nun haunting a favourite spot of its sanctuary. But look yet once more, and the illusion vanishes; for that speaking countenance tells of feelings that have more of earth than heaven—the slightly-parted lips bent forward in a listening attitude to every rustling of the neighbouring leaves, the burning flush mounting even to the forehead and brow, and then leaving the cheeks of a whiteness again—all these betray the presence of hopes and fears, and passions of poor mortals.

Hour after hour passed away, and Alice began to experience something of the disappointment of hope deferred. Madame de Rosel came to see why she loitered so long, and now proposed a walk, or a drive, or some other amusement "*pour passer le temps.*" The young Frenchwoman was not in love, and therefore in no position in which it pleased Alice to live with her not at all; and though she submi-

reasons of her own, with a pretty good grace, the words *ennui ! tristesse ! vie insupportable !* were seldom out of her mouth. On the present occasion, Alice was unusually firm in declining to leave home, and so Madame, drawing her cachmere closer round her, and shrugging her shoulders, walked away with a frown; voting *les Anglaises*, as she had done a thousand times before, the most stupid, cold, and incomprehensible mortals under the sun.

Perhaps had she waited ten minutes longer in the summer grotto, her opinion might have been somewhat shaken. A parting of the branching trees, a well-known step, a rapid sigh of relief from the pent-up heart, another burning blush, a fervent locking of hands, and Alice and Stuart have met.



## CHAPTER XVII.

---

“ Je sens trop que mon existence  
Ne tient qu'à toi,  
Avec toi, toute est jouissance,  
Et rien sans toi ! ”

---

AFTER the first pleasure and flutter was over, Alice and Stuart had learned to serve the changes a few months' acquaintance created in the appearance of each other. Formerly, as Stuart had noticed, with pain and surprise, the face she had so longed to look upon, that which had so haunted her waking and sleeping dreams—was grown pale and thin, her eyes spiritless and sad; while Stuart

scarcely believe that the dazzling being before him was in reality the drooping, meek-eyed girl, he had parted from in the preceding autumn. And he said, taking her hand again—

“ I know not which to congratulate you most upon, my dear cousin, your great accession of fortune, or your wonderful increase of beauty; many hearts will, I doubt not, be gladdened by the former, but quite as many must suffer by the latter.”

Alice blushed at this compliment, though she felt she would rather it had not been paid. She expected something more, though, when her cousin was gone, she smiled at her own folly in being disappointed because he had not fallen on his knees, and made a declaration of love at the first moment of their meeting. Stuart's manner to her had been kind, most kind and affectionate; and poor Alice was so little skilled in these matters, that she never dreamt an unacknowledged 'lover's manner

ought to be more or less than his was to her ; and though her cousin came not the next day, or the next, no doubts or misgivings entered her mind.

On the third he paid her a second visit, to announce that Sir Marmaduke and Lady Digby would arrive the following evening ; and Alice naturally believed that he had only wanted a similar excuse to have come on the other two. On this occasion he brought her a bouquet of the choicest flowers, in return for a sprig of his favourite jessamine that she had presented to him on his first visit ; and they walked round her beautiful gardens together, and Alice told him of the alterations and improvements she contemplated, in all of which his judgment was appealed to, and his suggestions instantly adopted.

And she talked much of the beloved friend she had lost, whose place she now filled, and Stuart could not fail to be distracted, for the time, from his own mournful thoughts, by the



confidences of the lovely and gentle girl who walked by his side ; though he was equally contented when the weary Frenchwoman thought it her duty as a chaperon to join them in their ramblings. Alice, however, guessed nothing of this ; and when they parted, it was with many projects and promises of future meetings.

The next evening Clara and her husband arrived, and from that time Stuart's visits were constant and long ; and though Alice was seldom or never alone with him, the daily increasing pleasure he took in her society was so evident, that she felt convinced he only waited to be certain of her affections before he disclosed his own.

Clara was charmed with Madame de Rosel, who, in her turn, was in ecstasies, and almost forgot her previous ennui, in the delight of having some one to speak to of her beloved Paris, and all its multitude of pleasures. Neither was Sir Marmaduke less contented than the rest, for he was living in a splendid

establishment at no personal cost, and escaped his wife's taunts, except when, by accident, they met alone.

And the spring was advancing rapidly, while still the guests of Alice Norton lingered at her beautiful villa, and still she, herself, lived as in a land of romance, for all smiled upon her, and the beloved one was ever by her side. The shady grotto was always their favourite haunt. It was there that Stuart often read aloud to them, while Alice and Clara sat enjoying the *dolce far niente*, so delightful to the dwellers in sunny Italy; and it was there too, when he was gone, that Alice would sit alone, thinking over every word he had spoken, and anticipating with rapture the time when she might pour out the fervent passion of her heart to him.

By degrees the melancholy of his aspect, that had so struck her on their first meeting, almost entirely disappeared; and Alice forgot that it had ever existed. Or if at times a sudden sigh or look of depression in her cousin re-

called it, it created no fears, and only made her redouble her efforts to cheer him into gaiety again ; and seldom did these earnest efforts fail. Stuart was indeed becoming more reconciled to what seemed his inevitable destiny, and the society of his sweet cousin had assisted greatly in making him so resigned.

One morning, while matters were in this state, Alice, immediately after breakfast, leaving Sir Marmaduke in the library, and Madame de Rosel and Clara to take their usual forenoon drive, went herself to the grotto, to prune and train some of the flowers, that a heavy shower of rain the preceding day had beaten down. None of the gardeners were ever allowed to interfere with this sacred spot. It had been Nina's favourite retreat, and that had endeared it first to her grateful friend, and many other pleasing associations had since rendered it still more cherished. Even the orange trees that grew around, forming a natural and fragrant screen from the sun—even these Alice

tended and watered herself, except when Stuart volunteered to assist her labours. And so she had come now to repair the damage the rain had done, and train her creeping favourites into beauty again.

By the time it was all finished, and Alice had contemplated with much satisfaction her unassisted exertions, she perceived that it was considerably past the hour at which Stuart generally joined them; and wondering what kept him, she proceeded to the house to inquire if the ladies were come home—remembering that they might possibly have met and detained him to drive with them.

Finding, however, that they were still absent, she returned to the grotto with a book, to await their appearance. The book was soon laid down, for Alice now found her own thoughts sweet and pleasant companions; and she sat listlessly plucking at the flowers that the soft wind wafted within reach of her hand, or occasionally making a feint to snatch at a painted

butterfly as it flew past; for in the abandonment of her perfect happiness Alice felt something of the recklessness of childhood, and much more than its wild and thoughtless joy.

"My heart tells me," she said to herself, "that this will be an important day to me; my hopes will be changed into certainties—he will whisper, 'I love you;'" and oh, what will be far, far sweeter, I may answer, "And I, too, love!"

The colour deepened on her soft cheek as she thus mused, and the next instant Stuart himself was by her side.

As usual, he took her hand, and then Alice, raising her eyes, which on his first entrance she had averted, from shame at her own thoughts, perceived that he looked very pale and unusually depressed.

"You are not well, Stuart?" she said, gently; "what has kept you so long this morning?"

"It was a letter from Fanny that detained me," he replied; "I had not heard from her before since my coming to Naples. But now, dear Alice," he continued, sitting down beside his cousin, "let me open my heart to you. I have long wished to do so, and it shall be delayed no longer. Will you attend to me patiently for half an hour? I met Clara and her companion, and they proposed taking a long drive, so we shall not be disturbed—and I will try not to weary you, Alice."

The reply was almost inaudible, for now that Alice imagined the long-expected time was come, she felt she would gladly have delayed it yet a little while, her heart beat so nervously. She still plucked at the waving jessamine, but now it was to hide the blushes of her tell-tale face; and Stuart began his tale.

"All, all was told to that gentle, quiet listener; all that the reader knows; his long and deep love for Eva Herbert; his hopes and fears,

and finally his terrible and bitter disappointment. "You," he continued, "you, Alice, who have never loved, can form no idea of the utter darkness that falls upon the heart when it discovers that its worship has been given in vain; when it finds that it has deceived itself, and that the object of its warmest passions and brightest hopes loves another. What can death be after this? But," continued Stuart, "I left the scene of my misery, Alice, and for months heard nothing of Eva; my father, who was my principal correspondent, never mentioned her name, for he knew my secret. I came here, and your companionship had effected more towards healing my mind than anything else could have done. You know, Alice, from the first you have been dear or dearer to me than my own sisters, and even before we parted in England I was nearly confiding all to you; for sympathy is so soothing, and yours, my sweet cousin, I know would have been given to me. To-day," he went on, "to-day I have heard

from Fanny; and her letter has renewed all my wretchedness. While I believed Eva happy, I could endure anything. But she is not so. Fanny tells me she grows paler and more desponding every day, and that all her gaiety is gone. Perhaps she repents her hasty engagement, or it may even be that she feels for my disappointment. But what signifies the cause? she is unhappy, and my short-lived peace is gone again. I cannot stay here, Alice, to cast a gloom over your circle; Clara knows nothing of all this. I must leave you, my dear cousin, to-morrow, delightful as your friendship and society have been to me. Heaven grant that you may be happier in your love, than I have been in mine!"

He turned towards his companion, expecting from her silence (for Alice had not once spoken since he began his story) to find her weeping. To his surprise there were no tears on her cheek, which was strangely and unnaturally flushed, and she still played with the creeping



flowers. Even then, no suspicion entered his mind respecting the state of his cousin's feelings; he only fancied she was depressed by his confession of such unhappiness, and proposed that they should go the house.

Alice did not seem to heed him, and then he thought she must be offended, and anxiously inquired if it was so. Then the young girl looked intently in his face, as though trying to understand what he said; but apparently she failed, for no words came from her lips. It was a very sultry day, and now Stuart fancied she might feel ill from sitting too long in the grotto, where the orange trees alone screened them from a burning sun; and again he begged her to return with him to the house.

At length Alice rose; but more, it seemed, in obedience to an impulse of her own, than from any desire to comply with her cousin's request. She took his arm mechanically, and he was frightened when he looked at her glistening eyes. A fearful suspicion darted

through his mind, though even then he did not connect it in any way with himself. Hastening with her through the gardens, without attempting to speak again, he called for her old attendant Margaret, and told her that her mistress seemed ill, and advised that a physician should be sent for immediately.

In an instant the ancient woman, who had known Alice from a child, comprehended the truth. "Almighty Father!" she cried, looking at the unconscious girl, "have mercy on her! My constant fears are come to pass. There was madness in her father's family—what has she heard? some terrible shock must have occasioned this."

Oh, who might ever tell the desolation that had swept over that young heart during the last dreadful hour; who might guess all the unfathomable wo, the sickening despair, which with every word had crept into that loving soul? As when the wreck of a noble vessel is found floating on the waves, the gazer can but

fancy the violence of the storm, can but picture to himself the fierce raging of the winds that have caused such terrible havoc, so only from the utter prostration of Alice Norton's mind, might be guessed the fearful strength of the whirlwind that had desolated a thing so fair.

For days, she continued in that state of mental unconsciousness, gentle and obedient as a child, but knowing no one, speaking to no one. The physician, who had been promptly summoned, looked grave and concerned, when each day brought no change in his patient. And yet there *was* a change; for the round, fair cheek grew hollow, and the bright blue eye dim. Stuart watched her with more than the devoted tenderness of a brother, for the physician's words, who had declared that only a shock of the most dreadful kind could account for so complete a prostration of the mental powers, had opened his eyes to something of the fatal truth; and thus Stuart felt that he was the innocent cause of all—and

even Eva was, for the time, forgotten, in the deep and wild regret this conviction brought.

At length poor Alice, her mind still darkened, was laid upon a bed of sickness, and little hopes were entertained that she would ever rise from it again. At this juncture Stuart was summoned to England on business that admitted of no delay, and the nature of which will be discovered as the narrative progresses. He left his cousin to the care of the devoted Margaret, and the kind, though light-hearted Frenchwoman. Clara and her husband quitted Naples at the same time—and thus the young, the rich, the beautiful, the lately envied Alice, was left almost desolate in a land of strangers. Her youth, her wealth, her beauty, were as nothing now, for the mind that animated all was gone. The storm had swept in fury by, and black night had succeeded to the fairest day.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

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“ O sweet suggesting love, if thou hast sinned,  
Teach me, thy tempted subject, to excuse it.”

---

BUT it is now necessary to go back to scenes of a very different kind.

Immediately after the announcement of Eva's engagement to Sir Felix Vaine, Charlotte Dacres returned to Glandale; Miss Stanley also quitted Elmcourt, and even Mrs. Nathan shortened her visit considerably. In truth, there was small attraction for anybody in the now mournful household. Mr. Aylmer, from the time of his son's departure, had become an altered person. Even Fanny's smiles, which she too often forced in the hopes of giving him pleasure,

failed to do so now. His wife was querulous and unhappy, for Isabel still hung heavy on her hands ; and Clara, who had always been her favourite, was alienated from her. The younger ones, too, had each their separate cause of discontent, and neither was in a condition to give comfort to the other.

Sir Felix, who had departed, as he promised, the day after his engagement was made known, corresponded regularly with Eva ; and except that they were from him, there was nothing in the letters to complain of. Love and devotion were their themes, and they invariably ended with a passionate entreaty that his probation might be shortened, and the time for the marriage fixed. One only of these communications Eva answered, and that was to impart her unalterable determination not to marry for at least a year. And though Sir Felix still continued to write and to implore, she took no further notice either of his letters or

his prayers. And thus the winter time passed away.

The short visit of Alice Norton was the only thing that broke in upon the monotony of Elmcourt, while new falls of snow lay upon the ground, and the winter was one of unusual length and dreariness. But all things must have an end, and scarcely had the trees put forth their earliest leaves, when Elmcourt was again deserted, and the melancholy occupants who had driven about its fair park so wearily of late, removed to Mr. Aylmer's spacious and elegant mansion in London.

Sir Felix was the first to welcome them, and Eva struggled hard to overcome the repugnance she felt, at receiving him as an acknowledged lover ; but the constant effort made her cheek paler, and her step listless and slow. Life had lost its interest for her, and the brilliancy of her beauty faded with her happiness.

She tasted at length the pleasures her young imagination had painted so brilliantly ; society

courted her, for she was an heiress, and still lovely enough to be an object of admiration; but there was one drop of poison in her cup, which turned all its sweetness to gall—the *bête noire*, in the shape of Sir Felix, haunted her steps continually, and there was no peace in her soul.

Many a time, when nearly maddened by the contemplation of her destiny, had she been on the point of breaking her hasty vow, and refusing evermore to see the man she so detested; but then, again, all her former reasonings and convictions concerning the binding nature of an oath, and the responsibilities to be incurred by disregarding it, would arise in her mind, and she could only mourn anew over the impotence of her efforts to loose such cunning bonds, and increase her endeavours to look with less horror on her future fate.

And drearily the long sunny days passed away, for Eva's heart was in none of those gaieties or amusements which, in prospective



had worn so fair an aspect. Neither did Fanny, with all her light-heartedness, that no sorrow could utterly subdue, enjoy the pleasure of "party, rout and ball," as her sisters had done before her; and though Mrs. Aylmer, with laudable ambition, used every effort to rouse her young daughter's vanity, and incite herto a desire for making a good match, Fanny, pursued the even tenor of her way, undisturbed by uneasy dreams of ambition, and comfortably unconscious of all her restless parent's heart-burnings and manœuvring on her account.

Many were attracted by the sweetness of her manners, many by her interesting face, and many more by her reputed prospect of thirty thousand pounds. But to all who ventured a formal proposal, Fanny's answer was the same; she had no thought of marrying, and importunity would be useless.

Isabel, with a fortune equal to her sisters, had her admirers also, but they were few, and

becoming less and less, and her temper was not improved by this circumstance ; and yet she sought every species of gaiety with even more unwearied ardour than before. No ball or opera to which she had access, ever numbered her among its absent ones ; and though each time she returned disappointed and petulant, her impatience for the next was not a whit the less perceptible.

Mr. Aylmer sometimes roused himself to accompany Miss Herbert and his daughters to evening parties, because he hated to lose sight of his darling Fanny, even for a few hours ; but if ever she obtained her mother's permission to remain at home, he was only too delighted to stay with her.

One evening Fanny, on the plea of a violent headache, had been excused from going to a large ball at Lady Mostyn's, and as usual her father discovered that he had business at home, and the rest of the family proceeded without them.

Mr. Aylmer, who was in unusually good spirits at the thoughts of a quiet evening with his favourite child, had presented Isabel with a valuable set of pearls, just before she dressed herself, saying as he did so—"You have been looking rather sentimental of late, my dear Bel, so if it's a truant lover you are sighing for, take this necklace as a talisman, and see if that won't bring him to your feet again!" Isabel thanked her father, and he bent down and kissed her forehead more tenderly than he had often done before.

"Charming! upon my word," was his exclamation, as his daughter descended to the drawing room, decked in her new ornaments. "I guess there will be plenty of conquests to tell of over our breakfast table tomorrow, eh, Fan? But Bel, my child if there should be any Frenchmen among the number, you need not mention them, you know, or," he continued, laughing, as Isabel turned away her head,

“throw them all into one; even then they would not be equal to a single Englishman. Well, good night, I don't want to tease you, poor child; we can't help our predjudices. Your mother sent you to that abominable Paris, and a pretty business she has——”

But his daughter was already out of hearing, so Mr. Aylmer abstained from troubling Fanny with the remainder of his anathema against France and French people, as she had never offended him by praising even the shape of a French cap or bonnet to the detriment of one of British manufacture, and was really quite as much attached to everything English as himself.

The ball was a very gay one. Ginerva Mostyn had been introduced at court at the sametimewith Miss Herbert and Fanny Aylmer, and they were generally acknowledged to be among the most beautiful girls of that season. Lady Mostyn was intoxicated with the success of her young daughter's first appearance, and

determined to spare no expense or trouble to facilitate her chances of marrying well. And Ginevra herself, in spite of the quietness of her previous life, appeared completely in her natural element amidst the gay and thoughtless. On this evening she looked very lovely in her simple but elegant dress of pale blue crape, with no ornament but her beautiful hair falling in a golden veil over her round, white shoulders.

When the Aylmer party were announced, she immediately left a group of ladies with whom she was conversing, and eagerly advanced to join the new comers; but in the rear came Sir Felix Vaine, and Ginevra's animation instantly subsided. As her mother's guest, she was obliged to welcome him with the others; but her look was so freezing, and her bow so haughty, that it instantly recalled to Eva's mind the conversation she had once had with Miss Mostyn respecting the baronet, before

her then communicative companion knew of her engagement to him.

“She shall tell me now her reasons for disliking him,” thought Eva; “he cannot appear to me in a worse light than he already does.” For this purpose she soon sought out their young hostess, and drawing her to a seat apart, implored Ginerva to communicate what she had only hinted before, respecting the principal cause of her antipathy to Sir Felix Vaine.

Ginerva appeared deeply distressed, and begged her companion to forget all that she had said. “Who can account for the caprices of children?” she added, “and I was but a child when Sir Felix was staying with us, you know.”

“Four months do not make such a vast difference in one’s age,” returned Eva; “and you would be ill-pleased to be counted a child now.”

“Well, well, do not ask me, dear Miss Her-

bert; I am sure I wish you every happiness. And he must love you so much."

"But," continued Eva, more seriously, "you are trifling with me now, Miss Mostyn. Excuse my importunity, but I think I have a right to know any circumstance another can communicate concerning my future husband."

"Then do not be angry, dear Miss Herbert. and I will tell you, if you ought to know. They are all dancing now, so come into this little room at the side, which opens on the conservatory—we shall be quite alone there."

"When they were seated, Ginerva continued: "Now, since you are determined to know why I hate this Sir Felix, I may as well tell you, that I never was so unhappy in my life (except once) as when I heard of your engagement to him. Pray forgive me if I go too far," she continued, looking up beseechingly at Eva, who, however, exhibited no symptoms of resentment at her companion's freedom of speech; and more encouraged, Ginerva went on—"While Sir Felix was staying with us, mama

took it into her head that I was flirting with a young man of the name of Northcott, whom I have known since I was a baby. I am sure I never thought of flirting, nor did he, but Sir Felix (mama told me this herself) represented to her the impropriety of allowing us to be so much together, declaring his opinion (the wretch!) that Percy would take advantage of my being such a child to force me into a clandestine engagement, or something worse. Yes," continued the speaker, her cheek crimsoning as she spoke, "he dared to insinuate that Percy Northcott, who is all that is good, and noble, and honourable, would—but you understand, Miss Herbert? I cannot repeat what he said, and what mama repeated to me; it is too dreadful, but now listen. The very day after this, when mama was out, and had forbidden me to receive any visitors in her absence, this man, this Sir Felix Vaine, came to me in my little study, and seeing me in tears (for I was miserable at what mama had told me) implored my



forgiveness for having interfered with regard to Mr. Northcott—he did not know that I had heard all—and excused himself on the plea of his own love for me. *His* love! oh Eva, the very idea made me shudder. I told him frankly the feelings of abhorrence with which I regarded him, but he did not heed me. He continued his detestable protestations, till, enraged beyond all powers of endurance, I rushed out of the room, and left him. But mama has gained nothing by following the counsel of such a serpent,” she continued, “for I have discovered, since I am debarred from Percy’s society, that I love him with more than sisterly affection. I might never have found it out, had they allowed us to go on as usual; but now, now, if, as I hope and believe, he loves me too, no earthly power shall prevent my marrying him, even if a prince of the blood-royal were his rival. But no one knows anything of this, Eva; I have trusted you with the one secret of my heart.”

"And you will not find your confidence misplaced," interrupted her companion. "I thank you sincerely for having gratified my curiosity; but now I have kept you too long from your guests. Go, dear Ginerva, I shall remain here a few minutes longer."

Ginevra went, and Eva wandered into the conservatory, and sat down amongst the flowers, listening to the sounds of music and of mirth that came from the adjoining rooms. Bitter tears filled her eyes as she mused on all she had heard; and though for some time a feeling of apathy and almost indifference to her fate, engendered by hopelessness, had been growing upon her, she could not but feel its sting again at this fresh proof of her lover's unworthiness, and of the estimation in which others held the man with whom she was to pass her life.

Suddenly the sound of voices, in eager debate, struck upon her ears, from the small apartment she had just left. It was one laid out with card-tables, but was dimly lighted and

unoccupied, and perhaps it might also have been provided by Lady Mostyn for the convenience of those who might wish to converse unobserved. At any rate, this seemed the purpose for which it was now used, and Eva retired farther into the conservatory, not wishing to overhear a conversation, that was evidently intended to be private. The talking, however, grew louder, and the unwilling listener was on the point of going forward to show them they were not alone, when the voice of Isabel Aymer arrested her attention.

“It would kill my father,” said the speaker, “if I consented, and yet I have not received so much kindness from him, that I should consider his happiness before my own.”

The answer was in French, and Eva could only catch the words “*Paris le bonheur*” and “*amour eternal*,” repeated several times; and then Isabel spoke again.

“And your wife?”

An impatient exclamation from her compa-

nion followed this, and Eva was now too horrified to think of retreating. A dreadful suspicion entered her mind, which was confirmed when the gentleman said, still in French, but more audibly—

“ My letters, dearest friend, must have prepared you for this. I could not longer exist without you. I adore you—you love me; we shall go to our beautiful France, and be happy. What would you more?”

“ It is enough!” murmured Isabel, and then they spoke again so low that Eva could distinguish nothing more.

Terrified beyond measure, her first thought was to seek Mrs. Aylmer, and communicate to her what she had heard; but this was not so easy, as that lady was in a distant room, eagerly engaged in playing cards; and the crowd in the ball-room was so great, that it was almost impossible to pass through it. In her distress Eva thought of telling Sir Felix Vaine, but a moment's consideration deterred her. It was

evident that the gentleman who had so unscrupulously proposed an elopement to his fair companion, was a married man, and Isabel's character would be eternally blighted should even her having listened to him be known. This plan therefore laid aside, Eva determined at all hazards to speak to Mrs. Aylmer, fearing that while she hesitated the intended fugitives might be preparing for their flight.

At length, with the assistance of Sir Felix, who had joined her the moment she reappeared in the crowded rooms, a passage was forced through to the place where Mrs. Aylmer sat. Eva immediately went up to her, and begged for five minutes' conversation.

"My dear Miss Herbert, pray wait till the game is finished," said the lady, somewhat pettishly. "Bless me, what are trumps? I declare you have put me quite out."

Several expressions of impatience from the rest of the devoted whist-players, and an angry scowl from an elderly gentleman, the partner

of Mrs. Aylmer, soon drove Eva from the card-table, with the conviction that she must think of some other plan for saving her guardian's daughter. After all, she had no means of knowing that the lovers had fixed that evening for their flight, and if, she reflected, she could but manage to keep Isabel near her till their carriage was announced, all would be well. With this view she despatched Sir Felix to seek her, and in the meantime joined a group of laughing girls, who were surrounding and chattering with the young hostess.

"Here comes *la belle fiancée*," was whispered as Eva approached, and all looked with envy on her who had obtained the long-coveted heart of the far-famed and fascinating favourite of fashion.

"Is she not very lovely?" whispered Ginevra Mostyn to her companions; and "very lovely" was eagerly and sincerely repeated by every one, for Eva was engaged, and so

they feared no rivalry, and she was received amongst them with unanimous warmth and cordiality.

“ Well,” said a young lady, who was, alas ! neither very fair nor *very* young, with an attempt to look as if she were speaking the truth, “ I would not be engaged for all the world ; just see how restless and nervous Miss Herbert is, because her gallant knight is away ; her eyes are constantly turning after him to the end of the room. I do believe she fancies he is flirting with somebody else.”

Eva smiled faintly at this ; but she was indeed growing uneasy at the long absence of her messenger, and even meditated another pilgrimage to the card-room, when Sir Felix at length appeared, and assured her that he had sought in vain for Miss Aylmer. For a moment Eva hesitated, and then she said, “ Sir Felix, I am not well, and should therefore like to return home immediately. You must explain this to Mrs. Aylmer, and say I will send the

swinging back for her. And you," turning to Harvey, "will make my address to Lady A. now. Now, Sir Felix, will you be kind enough to go and see about the carriage?"

Vanity is work of commensurate, Sir Felix received her instructions. Indeed, to judge by the manner in which he indulged Eva's wish to leave the party, it might almost be inferred that he was not sorry to have an opportunity of bestowing his smiles on more gracious and more adorning fair ones than her for whom he was in the habit of reserving them all. But alas! vanity requires continually for fresh food, vanity requires more than man's vanity especially is a very voracious, and must be gorged with things earthly and unworldly. And more wonderful still, vanity never satiates and dies like all things else when they are revolved. Can it ever so much, and still, with the horse-lace & claspings, it cries the more, "give! give!"

Thus at least cried Sir Felix Vaine; and while his beautiful and chosen one was being



rapidly whirled away from the brilliant scene, he stepped to a mirror in the small room before mentioned, and passed his fingers lightly through his still dark and shining curls preparatory to his reappearance in the larger rooms, and smiled a pleasant smile, as he meditated on the conquests he could now watch over, and the hearts he might now play with at his will.

END OF VOL. II.

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# **THE POOR COUSIN.**



# THE POOR COUSIN:

A NOVEL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

EDITED BY THE AUTHOR OF

"THE SCOTTISH HEIRESS;" "THE YOUNG WIDOW;" "THE YOUNG  
BARONET;" ETC.

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1846.



# THE POOR COUSIN.

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## CHAPTER I.

---

“ And every wo a tear may claim,  
Except an erring sister's shame.”

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ON arriving at home, Eva went straight to Mr. Aylmer's study, and finding him there alone—Fanny having just gone to bed—related in a few words the conversation she had overheard between his daughter and her lover, omitting only the fact of the gentleman being a married man; and adding her fear that it might already be too late to interfere, as Isabel was nowhere to be found when she left the party. “ I

thought it best to come at once to you," she continued in much agitation, "without alarming any one else, for if you are in time, nothing of this need be known."

"You have acted most prudently, my dear Miss Herbert," replied Mr. Aylmer, rising immediately with a flushed cheek and an excited eye, "and I thank you sincerely. An elopement! how disgraceful—ungrateful, cruel girl—and with a Frenchman, too. Ah! that must be the reason. She knew I would never give my consent to receive one of those whiskered fops as a son-in-law. It is a sad thing," he continued mournfully, and again sitting down, "to be disappointed in the children we have reared and loved—a sad, sad thing."

Eva timidly suggested that he had better make all haste to Lady Mostyn's house, and if his daughter was still there, to insist upon her accompanying him home.

"My dear Miss Herbert," said the old man, "you have been educated in England by a



worthy, pious uncle ; my poor girl was not permitted this advantage, and now, now the truth is—though my heart bleeds to say it—Bella is not fit to be an Englishman's wife ; she would disgrace him ! so even let her take her own way. I renounce her, as I did Clara for a less offence."

Eva now felt the necessity of explaining all ; and pale and trembling she faltered out, " Mr. Aylmer, I find I must conceal nothing. As you value your own and all your other children's future peace and honour, lose no time—Isabel's lover is a married man !"

A look of wild despair announced how little the wretched father was prepared for this. A few seconds of total silence followed, and then came that heartrending sound, the choking sob of manhood's agony. " My God, have mercy !" burst at length from his quivering lips.

Eva, dreadfully alarmed, was on the point of calling Fanny, when a loud and continued knocking at the door announced the return of

Mrs. Aylmer. Pale and breathless she rushed into the room, exclaiming eagerly, "Is Bella here? Miss Herbert, did she return with you? Have you seen her?"

Then Mr. Aylmer roused himself, and in a voice broken by deep emotion, thus addressed his awe-stricken wife.

"Woman, your daughter is where your lessons and your tuition have driven her—in the arms of a married man! Go and find her if you will, and should ever a particle of remorse be aroused in that guilty heart, soothe her by your counsels into self complacency again. Tell her such errors are venial in the sight both of God and man. Tell her the cry of the forsaken wife will never rise against her at the judgment-day. Tell her the curse of her aged father and the tears of her innocent sisters will never haunt her gayest hours. Tell her to smile again and be happy, for sighs and frowns would mar the precious beauty that has gained her so brilliant a destiny!" He

paused, and the large tears rolled down his furrowed cheeks, while Mrs. Aylmer was, or feigned to be, in violent hysterics.

Assistance being procured, she was taken to her room, and Fanny joined her wretched and excited father. Alas! there was no time now for mingling their tears. The carriage that had brought home his wife was immediately ordered out again, and Mr. Aylmer proceeded alone to Lady Mostyn's house, to learn what he could respecting the destination of the guilty pair.

The dancing had not yet ceased, nor half of the crowds dispersed, when he arrived; for though the disappearance of Isabel Aylmer had already been whispered round the room, what was there in that to check the mirth or gaiety of the thoughtless ones who listened to the news? What to them that a home was made desolate, or a sacred vow profaned? What to them that one with whom an hour before they had eagerly joined the hand

in fellowship, was now become a thing to point and jest at; the mark of all good men's scorn, an outcast from society and from heaven!

Nay, the rapidly-circulated intelligence did but give a zest to their amusements, by forming a subject on which all might converse, and endeavour to prove their own immaculate virtue by the loudness and bitterness of their declamations against a sinful and fallen sister.

Of course Lady Mostyn was exceedingly shocked and indignant at so scandalous a thing occurring at her house; but the only information she could give to the wretched father was that a French count of the name of Villemont had been seen frequently during the evening in conversation with his daughter. The servants were all called up and interrogated, and one of them (the porter) remembered having observed a lady and gentleman, the former closely muffled in a cloak and shawl, pass through the hall about two hours previous. Believing them to be hus-

band and wife, he had taken no particular notice, but fancied they left early, because they were going a journey, as he heard the lady say, "We shall reach Dover to-night, then?"

Mr. Aylmer waited to hear no more; driving rapidly home, he went to his own room, and took from a cabinet a small case, opened it, and examined the contents. That done, he despatched his coachman to order post-horses, and then sent for Fanny.

The summons was instantly obeyed, and the father and daughter were alone.

"My child," said the former, folding his darling to his heart, "the troubles of our family are multiplying fast; God only knows why we are thus afflicted, but He can give us strength to bear the burden, grievous as indeed it is."

He then detailed the information he had gained, and expressed his determination of instantly pursuing Isabella and her lover.

“And if,” he continued, “I am not in time to save the wretched girl, at least my boy, my noble-hearted Stuart, shall not be sacrificed. My life is worthless; are not all my children either guilty or unhappy?” I am but an useless cumbrer of the ground, and a few years more or less matter very little!”

“Papa, my own dear papa,” sobbed Fanny, “do not speak in that way. You know you are everything to me, and oh! do not look so wretched; all may yet be well. You will overtake my sister and bring her back; she will repent, and we will all go abroad till this frightful thing is forgotten. Dear, dear papa, smile just once again, on your poor Fanny!”

But Mr. Aylmer could not smile, for, alas! the visions of sixty are less hopeful and radiant than those of eighteen; but he laid his hand on his young daughter's head, and solemnly, fervently blessed her. “My good, my loving child, heaven will make you happy,” he said;

"and, Fanny, life is uncertain—we may never meet again. I need not say be kind to your unfortunate mother, for I know your heart; but be gentle with that guilty one, if ever she repents, and bear my forgiveness to poor Clara—perhaps I have been too harsh to her—but oh! her heart was steeled against me. The vile country she was reared in taught her to despise the sacred ties of kindred—the holiness of domestic affections is a mockery there; all things are a mockery there, but vanity and show! Well, well, doubtless she has had her reward.—And the other, poor poor thing! I could weep for her if I were not so old, but I am talking wildly; oh! Fanny, what a vain dream is life. Here, give me that case, I must be gone. Come to my heart once more, my ever good and cherished one—and now farewell. Attend to your mother—to-morrow, perhaps.—Now give me that case, the horses have arrived."

Fanny obeyed mechanically, for her own

mind was too much unsettled by the suddenness of all that had just occurred, to remark the wildness of her father's manner, but as she handed it to him, a fearful thought glanced across her mind.

"Papa," she cried, withdrawing the box, "what can you mean? These are pistols! You never would, you never shall, risk a life so precious in such a cause. Oh, father! listen to me;" and she knelt before him; "think not of anything so dreadful, so wicked. Remember the words 'Vengeance is mine!' Oh, stop, stop!" she implored, as Mr. Aylmer tried to tear himself away. "Have you not always reprobated those who did such things? have you not always spoken of duellists, from whatever cause, with horror? And are the principles of a life to fade away in the first moment of temptation? Oh my own dear, good father, say you were dreaming, mad, anything but determined on so horrible an act. There, give me the case, and now—oh I am faint—



help me—" And poor Fanny, overcome by her excess of fear and emotion, fainted, (for the first time in her life) at her father's feet.

Gently raising her, he placed her on the bed, and then called Eva and a servant to attend her. "She will recover," he murmured, as he bent over his inanimate child; "recover, perhaps to find herself fatherless. Oh, God! shield my darling!" and pressing a last fervent kiss on her forehead, he hastened to the carriage, which had been some minutes at the door; and having given orders to be driven with all the speed of which the horses were capable, leaned back, and burying his face in his clasped hands, resigned himself to meditations, the fearful agony of which might only be conjectured from the gasping sobs, that during that rapid journey broke continually from his oppressed and tortured bosom.

## CHAPTER II.

---

" She stood in silence there,  
She wept not nor looked up,  
But seemed as of despair  
She'd drained the bitterest cup."

---

ON recovering from her fainting-fit, Fanny went immediately to her mother, having first ascertained that the dreaded pistols were left behind. Mrs. Aylmer was now perfectly recovered from her hysterics, but to these succeeded a torrent of anger and abuse against the unfortunate Isabel, that made the sister tremble as she listened to it. At length, exhausted by her own violence, the wretched woman fell asleep, and then poor Fanny stole quietly to her room,

and spent the remainder of the night in prayer for her father, sister, all. And when the morning came, though worn out and ill from suffering and want of sleep, she was again at her mother's side.

It had occurred to her that her father might only have left the pistols to quiet her fears about him, and that he really intended, after all, to challenge his daughter's seducer. This idea, while it made her blood curdle, and her heart almost cease to beat, determined her to communicate what she suspected to her mother, that should the worst come to pass, the latter might be in some measure prepared. Mrs. Aylmer, however, was, or feigned to be, more sanguine as to the result of this terrible affair than Fanny.

"Nonsense, child," she said, in reply to her daughter's communication, "your father will overtake them and bring Bella back. Why need there be any fighting in the case? How thoughtless of you, Fanny, to talk in that

way, knowing, as you do, the state of my nerves just now. There, give me my smelling-bottle; and now go and bring me a cup of chocolate, I am sinking fast from all this worry."

Fanny obeyed in silence, and after that (as her mother declared she could not endure the sight of such a long face, and requested to have Fanchette sent to her) she joined Eva in the breakfast-room, and from her learned all that the latter had before told to Mr. Aylmer. But no comfort could be extracted from this, and the day was spent in mournful sadness. Numbers of carriages, from which many curious faces were seen peeping, passed the house during the whole morning; but with the exception of Sir Felix Vaine, no one called. Even he was not admitted, for Fanny had begun to fear the worst, and Eva never left her for a moment.

As the evening advanced, Mrs. Aylmer herself could not avoid sharing in some degree

her daughter's alarm, though she still persisted that there was no danger of a duel taking place, and that it was most heartless and unnatural in Fanny ever to have suggested so horrible an idea. And night came, and still no intelligence had reached the anxious party. At an early hour Mrs. Aylmer retired to her own room, after begging Fanny not to come near her again, till she had learned to look less miserable. And Fanny had every inclination to obey this request, for her mother's sentiments jarred strangely against her own, and made her feel that, in spirit at least, her father was her only parent.

And another morning dawned at length, and still found the gentle heart of the loving Fanny torn by the cruellest suspense, while her mother only showed that *her* mind was agitated by an increased degree of fretfulness and ill-humour towards all who approached her. Eva's tender sympathy, as well as her superior strength of character, were very

valuable to poor Fanny now, and these alone prevented the latter from sinking entirely under the pressure of so great an affliction as that which threatened her.

It was about noon ; (the eagerly watched for postman long had passed, bringing no letter, as they had hoped he might have done) when a carriage with all the blinds drawn closely up stopped at the door. Eva and Fanny were in the drawing-room together, and the latter instantly started up, a flush of joyful surprise appearing for an instant on her lately pale and anxious face. " It is our own carriage," she said eagerly, preparing to go down stairs, " and papa must be come ;" but ere the door was reached, she turned back again, and sinking on a chair, burst into tears, at the same time murmuring, " Dear Eva, I am so happy !" Eva hastened to her side, but before another word could be spoken by either of them, the drawing-room door opened, and a muffled figure entered. The two girls turned round to

ascertain who was the intruder, and a thick silk hood that had concealed her head and face, being thrown aside, the features of Isabel Aylmer were revealed.

But what a fearful tale those ghastly features told ! Oh sin, thy curse was written legibly there in characters that time might never, never efface. It was not in the paleness of her cheek alone, nor in the burning of her dark and tearless eye, but the whole aspect at a single glance betrayed that the fearful work of remorse had begun, and that for her there remained nothing more on earth.

Fanny, however, saw nothing of this. On first recognising her sister she had started up and thrown her arms round Isabel's neck, exclaiming, in a voice of tender affection—  
“ Dear, dear Bella, welcome, a thousand times welcome, to your home again. Oh I am so happy ; we shall all be happy now ; but where is dear papa ? I do so long to see him too ! ”

Isabel had not returned her sister's embrace, and she now drew back, and looked at Fanny stedfastly for a minute or two, but still did not speak.

"Is your papa gone to Mrs. Aylmer?" now said Eva, who had been gazing with unfeigned horror at the altered appearance of Isabel, and began to think her continued silence strange.

Isabel looked up as Miss Herbert spoke, but gave no sign of understanding what was said.

"Bella, dear Bella, where is papa?" again Fanny asked, and more earnestly than before; but she was still as unsuccessful in obtaining an answer. She looked anxiously at her sister now, and as she did so a chill crept into her heart. Isabel was in the same dress that she had worn at Lady Mostyn's ball, and the dazzling finery contrasted horribly with her wo-stricken countenance. While the eyes of her young, pure sister were bent eagerly and inquiringly upon her, Isabel, from some instinc-



tive feeling, raised both her hands to cover her suddenly glowing face. In this movement one of the pearl bracelets which her father had given her but two evenings before, broke, and the pearls were scattered on the carpet. A start, a smothered groan followed, and the miserable girl tore the other from her arm, and then sinking on the nearest seat, burning tears gushed from her eyes, as she shrieked, rather than said, in reply to Fanny's now wildly-repeated question of "where is papa?" — "*Papa is dead!*"

### CHAPTER III.

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"An orphan's curse would drag to hell  
A spirit from on high;  
But oh! more horrible than that  
Is the curse in a dead man's eye!"

---

Two months had elapsed, and Elmcourt was again inhabited. It was now the end of May, and the fine old park was green and shadowed by its noble oaks and beeches, and the well-kept shrubberies bright with their many-coloured plants and flowers. All without the mansion was fair and unchanged, but within! here was change indeed. No sound of ringing laughter was ever heard in the silent rooms, no pleasure-seeking parties ever issued from its

doors; every head was bent, and every face was sad, of those who had now made Elmcourt once more their dwelling-place. And what had wrought all this? what but that mighty destroyer who changes all things fair, and, converts many and many a glad home into an abode of misery and lamentation. It was SIN! One vain and selfish heart had yielded to its first temptation, and death and woe had been the consequences, even to the unsinners and the pure. The kind and loving father fell by the hand of his child's seducer; the noble-hearted brother returned, but in time to follow that father to his grave, to find his mother a widow, one sister for ever dishonoured, and the other bowed to the very dust by these accumulated misfortunes.

Mrs. Aylmer, as soon as she was in a condition to be moved, had retired to Elmcourt with the whole of her family, including Clara and Sir Marmaduke, for these two latter had accompanied Stuart to England, when the intelligence of Isabel's disgrace and its frightful

consequences reached them. Eva, too, still remained Mrs. Aylmer's guest, for though, being now more than eighteen years of age, and according to her father's will her own mistress, and at liberty to choose any residence she pleased, how could she leave poor Fanny at such a time?"

One evening, just as the sun had set, and the dim twilight was settling on the earth, two ladies walked side by side through the thickest and most secluded part of the shrubbery. One was closely wrapped in a large shawl, and a bonnet and veil entirely concealed her face; her steps were feeble, and she paused to rest at almost every rustic seat they came to. This was Isabel Aylmer, and her companion was Lady Digby. The latter was the first to speak.

"My dear Bel," she said, "I do wish you would shake off a little of this terrible despondency. It is positively killing us all."

Isabel looked up for a moment, and cast her

eyes over her sister's elaborately trimmed mourning dress, and noted the studied elegance of her appearance, but she looked down again, and said not a word; and Clara continued—

“Just conceive how horribly dull and mopish it is for Sir Marmaduke and myself to be staying here, and mama will not hear of our leaving her, she says, till you have given up that woe-begone aspect. I know, I know, my poor Bel, that all these frightful things must have shaken you terribly, but if you fret yourself into the grave it won't mend them now.”

A sudden and convulsive pressure of her sister's arm was all the answer Isabel could give, and again Lady Digby went on—

“Just think, dear Bel, how very much worse your case might have been. You must feel and know perfectly well that there are many mothers who would never have received you at all, after such an escapade as yours; but instead of this, mama I am sure very rarely reproaches you, and never when anybody but

ourselves is by; and she even offers, if you would look happy and cheerful again, to take you to France, and give you a chance of getting a husband there. Now really this is so kind and sensible a plan, that I wonder you are not enchanted with it, and you used to like *La Belle France* so much; besides, I do think you should consider the rest of your family, and remember, that as long as you are seen in England, this ghastly affair will never be forgotten——”

“Clara, Clara,” said Isabel, in a low and hollow voice, “for heaven’s sake, stop. I do not blame you for being selfish and heartless; our education made us so; and God grant that bitter and horrible experience, that sin and woe, may never teach you feeling, as it has done me. But listen, Clara; sit down by me here, and listen. I must speak now, or my heart will burst. A few hours after I had taken that step which sealed my fate for ever, not many hours after, papa stood beside me;

his words were stern, but not unmixed with kindness, and I guessed that he had some horrible intention, for directly after, he went out with my companion and two other gentlemen I did not know. I would have followed them, but the fatigue and excitement I had undergone were too much for me, and I fainted at the door. On recovering (it was still early in the morning) I questioned the servants of the hotel; but they knew nothing. Another hour of horrid suspense followed, and, at the end of that time, I was summoned, Clara, to our father's death-bed. Clara, I knelt by his bed, I heard his groans of agony, I watched the film of death slowly gathering over his eyes, I wiped the damp from his forehead; I prayed, madly prayed, when I knew hope was over, and during all this time there was not one word of forgiveness to cheer me. He either did not, or would not, seem to know me. Once he muttered between his closed teeth, 'A Frenchman,

too ! have I deserved this ?' And once again, immediately before his death, I heard him murmur, while his eyes were raised as if in prayer, ' My little Fan !' and then a strong convulsion shook him, and he died ! Clara, Clara, if you had seen all this, if you had been the cause of all this, would you, could you forbear to pine and mourn ? Look at me now. Is there in this altered countenance a single trace of what I was ? Think you it is sickly sentiment or indolent indulgence that makes me shun the very light of day ? You talk of my going to France, and seeking amusement, and even—I shudder to name it—a husband ! Oh, Clara, my sister, believe me there are such things as broken hearts, though we were taught to regard as a pretty fable the very existence of that grief which kills. No, no I will never, never go to France. Let me die here ; you know I am dying, Clara ; mama knows it too ; do not torture me then during the little time I shall be with you. And above all, Clara, do



not leave me yet; I can speak to none other but you; for though Fanny, poor Fanny is kindness itself, and has never breathed a word of the fondest affection, there is to me a far keener reproach in her pure but tearful eyes; than in the most cruel harshness from another. And Stuart—oh, I can see what it costs his upright and noble heart to avoid cursing me for all the desolation I have caused; and yet, and yet, I know you are all far kinder to me than I deserve. Oh, why, why, were we sent to that hateful, hateful France?" and covering her pale face with both her hands, Isabel Aylmer sobbed aloud.

"Come, come, *ma pauvre petite*," said Clara, in a soothing tone, "you are horribly out of spirits to-night. It is unquestionably very shocking all that you have told me, but you are sorry for it, and what else is there to be done? I am sure you have repented enough, sitting all day long, dull or fair, in a room from which every ray of light is excluded, and

never coming out for a breath of air till it is nearly dark, and the dews are falling. *I* always understood that the best way of proving repentance sincere was by amendment, and, where an injury to another has been committed, by making reparation. Now the only way in which you can repair the injury done to all your family, is by abandoning those sorrowful looks, and going abroad. And my opinion is, that the sooner this is accomplished the better. You may depend on it, we are all excessively weary of this sort of life. Sir Marmaduke liked well enough living at another's expense, when he was comparatively a poor man; but now that my long-despaired-of thirty thousand pounds is come, he has taken a new whim, and is anxious to show off a little in London. I assure you, Bel, I have enough to do to keep him quiet here, and nothing but my consideration for you would induce me to stay, myself; but upon my word, I can't stand it much longer. By the by, that little Herbert

endures her absence from her *futur* much better than I should do. I really begin to think that Stuart, too, loves the beautiful Eva. Just fancy what a *contretemps* if it should be so. Then there was Alice Norton. I am sure Stuart and she seemed like lovers; but, fortunately, she went mad before it came to anything; however, there must have been some sort of attachment, for he hears constantly from her old nurse about the state of her health, and all that. Conceive, Bel, a mad wife! don't you think Alice was very wrong and unprincipled not to explain to Stuart before, that there was madness in the family? But, good gracious, child! you are crying and puling still, while I have been torturing my poor brains to find subjects to amuse you. It is getting dreadfully cold, too, so come into the house, and for pity's sake don't let mama see you have been crying, or she will begin about her nerves again. There, take my arm if you are really so dreadfully weak, and when we

get in, you must have some sal volatile, or something of that sort to drive away the vapours—and go to bed. I dare say you will be better in the morning.”

## CHAPTER IV.

---

"She only said, 'I'm very weary,  
I won't stand this,' she said."

---

THE next morning, at rather an early hour, Clara entered her mother's bed-room, and finding that lady asleep, she hesitated not a moment in waking her.

"What's the matter now?" said the fretful voice of Mrs. Aylmer, as she turned on her pillow without opening her eyes.

"Mama, it is I," answered Clara, "and I want to talk to you."

"Very well, my love, I did not know it was you; sit down, Clara, but first prop up

my pillows comfortably for me. There, that will do ; and now I am quite prepared to listen."

"The fact is, then, *chère maman*, I am come to announce to you that I can't and won't stay any longer at this horrible place, and so you must make up your mind as quickly as possible to do without me.—Now wait a minute ; I know you are going to begin about your nerves, but it will be of no avail in the present case, because I am determined on going. I have done all I can to oblige you about poor Bel ; I have taken her off your hands, walked with her (at the risk of getting rheumatism and all sorts of diseases) while sensible people are sitting round a comfortable fire ; talked to her, advised and sympathized with her, and what is the result ? Why she is just as mopish and hypochondriacal as ever, and calls me heartless and selfish because I do not fret and pine away my life and good looks like herself. Now I should be glad to know if

anybody could stand this long. We never see a human face besides the gloomy, tearful ones of our own family. Stuart is always in his own room, and I conclude you don't expect me to be satisfied entirely with the society of my sapient husband."

"No, Clara," answered Mrs. Aylmer, "I do not, although you chose Sir Marmaduke yourself: however, I am not going to reproach you for this. He is very well as husbands go, and you must make the best of him. But listen to me for a moment, Clara. I cannot endure the thoughts of your leaving me yet. You know you have always been my favourite, and that your society has been my only consolation for the last two miserable months. Remember, I can leave my money as I please, Lady Digby, and I am sure I shan't live long.—Now do not stop me, I know you are going to say that you shall not live long either if you stay here; but what would you gain by going. You must be aware that it would be most

indecent to show yourself in public at present ; and if you fix your abode at Digby-lodge, you will find at this time of the year as little society there as you have had at Elmcourt."

" Very likely, mama, but I shall at least be spared the sight of the corpse-like visages that haunt me here. Why, if I take up a novel and seem amused by it, I am certain to catch either Miss Herbert's or Fanny's eyes bent upon me in silent wonder. *Vraiment tout cela m'ennuie trop.*"

" Well, my love, you know it is no fault of mine that things continue in this state. I am sure if Stuart were gone it would soon be different ; but once, when I proposed, for the sake of you young people, to receive the visits of a few of our nearest and quietest neighbours, he gave me such a look that I have been afraid to speak of it again."

" And when is this prim and pure young gentleman going to leave us ?"

" I do not know, Clara, when he is going



away ; but one thing I do know, which I scarcely suspected before, and that is that your brother is in love with Eva Herbert."

"Possibly ; but that is nothing to us, or our purpose."

"Pardon me, Clara, it is much to my purpose, as you shall hear. I received a letter yesterday from Miss Herbert's *fiancé* Sir Felix Vaine ; a charming letter it was, too, telling me that affairs of importance obliged him to come into this neighbourhood, and entreating my permission to allow him, while here, to call on Miss Herbert. He knows we receive no visitors at present, and this respectful but friendly note proves his perfect breeding and knowledge of the world. Ah, Clara, there is a man that I should have rejoiced to welcome as a son-in-law. There is a man that would have suited my high-spirited and lovely Clara." Clara blushed slightly, but allowed her mother to proceed without interruption.—"Of course I have not answered this letter yet, for I have

been turning the matter over in my mind. Now I know you have some curiosity to see this Adonis; and as you are a married woman, and he an engaged man, there can be no danger in an introduction—and my plan is this. I shall write immediately to Sir Felix, telling him, that under the peculiar circumstances in which he is placed towards our young guest, I cannot refuse to receive his visits. To Stuart I shall say that it is by Miss Herbert's request I have done so, and this I know will drive him out of the house for a time. And thus you will have a charming and intellectual companion almost entirely to yourself; for, candidly speaking, I think Eva has very little love for her *beau futur*, and would rather shun than seek his society. But listen, Clara: before I take all this trouble, you must promise me to stay at least a month longer, and to assist me in keeping up the spirits of that wretched and unfortunate Isabel."

"I do promise, mama," replied Clara as

she bent to kiss her mother's cheek, "provided I find Sir Felix Vaine as handsome and agreeable as he is represented."

"Oh, there is no fear of your not doing that Clara; so now I shall ring for Fanchette to dress me, and you had better go and see how your sister is this morning."

That same day, as Clara and her husband were yawning over some new books and engravings that had just arrived from London, a footman entered the room with a very elaborately embossed card, on which was written the name of "Mrs. William Weatherspoon."

"We do not know such a person," said Lady Digby, throwing the card carelessly on the table; then turning to the servant, she continued sharply, "have you not had orders to say to all strangers that we do not receive visitors at present."

"Yes, my lady," replied the domestic, struggling to smooth his features into proper decorum—though, in spite of his efforts, a

covert grin was plainly perceptible—"and so I did tell her, but she said she was an old acquaintance, and would not be denied."

"Who can it be?" said Clara, speaking half to herself.

"If you please, my lady," chimed in the footman, who still waited for orders, "I think it's Mrs. Jeremiah Nathan, as was, whom, your ladyship must remember, was staying here last year."

"Mrs. Nathan! impossible. However, if you are sure of this, John, show her up; and then go and inform Mrs. Aylmer that she is here."

John departed, and in a few seconds returned, ushering in the *ci-devant* widow of Jeremiah Nathan, Esq., of Calcutta, now transformed into the blooming bride of William Weatherspoon, of Elmhurst.

"My dear Miss Clara—I beg your pardon, I mean Lady Digby"—she said in her usual loud voice, "I am mighty glad to see you

again, and your good gentleman too ; you look very well, though a little palish, my dear, but that is but natural, of course. I am but just returned from our wedding tour to the Isle of Wight, or you may be sure I should have been here long ago to offer my condolences, and all that sort of thing. I assure you, my William gave his special permission for me to come, and even urged me to do so—he has no foolish squeamishness about affairs of this kind—but where’s your dear mama, and little Fanny, and Miss Herbert?”

“ Mama will be here presently, I dare say,” replied Clara, “ but I don’t suppose you will see either Miss Herbert or Fanny. They wander about together all day, and Stuart mopes in his own room. We are a very *triste* circle, I promise you.”

“ Ah! I suppose so, poor things ; and Miss Bella. What has become of her?”

“ She is in very bad health, and sees nobody, Mrs. Weatherspoon,” replied Clara, more coldly

than before. Having admitted the old fool, as she always called her, for her own amusement, she began to suspect that the bride came only to pry into the secrets and troubles of the family.

“Bless me, that is very sad; but here comes your mama—Ah, my dear friend,” rising to meet and embrace her, “what pleasure it gives me to see you once more. I have torn myself from my William the very day after our return, to hasten to your side.”

“You are vastly obliging, Mrs. Weather-  
spoon, and I’m sure I am delighted at your visit,” replied her friend; “and now sit down and let us hear the news. We did not even know that you were married.”

“Well, now, only to think of that. I am sure it was put into three of the fashionable papers at least, and I should have sent you cards, only my William thought it would be extravagant having them engraved, and he said something so pretty and sentimental about laying by for the future wants of a young

family, that I could not contest the point ; but I bought these embossed ones, (taking up that which Clara had thrown on the table,) and paid the grocer's apprentice, who writes a beautiful bold hand, half a crown for inscribing my name on the whole pack of them."

"I think it was an excellent plan," said Sir Marmaduke, who now spoke for the first time since Mrs. Weatherspoon had come in.

"Why, yes, as dear Weatherspoon always says, 'a penny saved is a penny gained.' You know my present husband is a Scotchman, and he inherits, dear creature, all the proverbial prudence of his nation. I must positively tell you an interesting little anecdote of our courtship, which illustrates his character to a nicety. You remember, Mrs. Aylmer, that I first met him while on a visit to you last autumn ; but though I saw he was much struck with me, no regular engagement took place during my stay in Derbyshire. Well, when I left you I went to Cheltenham, and before I had been

there a week, who should I meet one morning walking out of the pump-room and making a horrible grimace, but Mr. Weatherspoon. He had come, he told me, to drink the waters for a liver complaint, and gracious knows he did look yellow enough; but a first taste he said was sufficient, and he should never try so desperate a remedy again. Well, my dears, we walked round the gardens together, and he told me, with many expressions of sincere regret, that during the last stage to Cheltenham he had unfortunately lost, from the top of the coach, a blue cloth cloak, which he valued highly. 'I have made many inquiries,' he continued, 'respecting it, and even put an advertisement in the paper offering a reward of five shillings to any one who shall bring it me; for though I fear, even if found, it will be partially torn to pieces by the wheels, still'—and he gave me such a look and squeeze of the hand—'still, it might do hereafter to cut up for *little* coats!' Now I will say it than, the whole annals of romance or



reality, I should think there never was an offer made so delicately or beautifully as this. Of course I understood him at once, and from that time we considered ourselves engaged."

"And did Mr. Weatherspoon succeed in recovering the cloak?" said Sir Marmaduke, with some degree of interest.

"The remains of it only; for, as he had rightly conjectured, it was sadly mutilated by the coach wheels."

"Well, but have you no news to tell us?" said Mrs. Aylmer, impatient of the fair bride's courtship reminiscences.

"Why, my dear, you see we only returned yesterday; and though my William started the first thing this morning to call on his different friends and find out all had that taken place during his absence, he gleaned very little in the way of news, I assure you. Indeed the only thing of any interest was concerning Lady Julia Maddy, whom you all remember. They say she has had an offer from the very

cousin who came in for her grandfather's fortune, when Sir Felix Vaine declined marrying her. He must have had at the least five thousand a year; but she refused him for all that, even though, I understand, he offered her an aviary built on a style of the greatest magnificence, and filled with the rarest and most beautiful birds that money could procure.—Well, she refused him and has since lived with her old mother at Bath, where she keeps three cages full of canaries, and writes tracts for the poor of the neighbourhood.”

“And all this from her hopeless love for Sir Felix?” asked Lady Digby, who had taken no interest in any part of the previous conversation.

“So it is said, my dear; but perhaps you have never seen Sir Felix Vaine. Ask Miss Herbert, if there is anything to wonder at in this. Ah, well-a-day, love is a very funny thing, though by no means unpleasant. But good gracious, it is four o'clock—Weatherspoon

will think I am lost. We young married women," continued the youthfully attired bride, rising to arrange her orange blossoms at the glass, "cannot quite consider our time at our own disposal; our lords and masters naturally exact a fair proportion of it."

"And it is but just and right that we should yield it to them," said Clara, who began to be excessively weary of Mrs. Weatherspoon's babbling.

"Ah, my dear, I knew you would be a pattern for all married ladies; but good bye, good bye, I must positively tear myself away now; and next time I shall expect to see Miss Bel. I shan't mind it, I shan't upon my honour, neither will my William, I assure you. Tell her this from me, and bid her prepare herself for a visit very soon. Oh, no thanks, my dear creatures; I am an old friend, you know, and never was particularly squeamish. Adieu—*au revoir*." And assuming a juvenile mincing step, the lady made her exit from the room.

"John," said Clara to the footman, who answered the bell, she had rung furiously, the moment the hall door was closed, "the next time Mrs. Weatherspoon calls, do not forget to say that we are all particularly engaged."

## CHAPTER V

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“ Oft must my heart the question undergo  
Of, ‘ dost thou love?’ and burn to answer— no.”

---

NOT many days after this visit of Mrs. Weatherspoon, as the whole family, excepting Isabel, who rarely left the solitude of her own room, were sitting together after dinner, a note was brought in and handed to Miss Herbert. Too well she knew the writing, and becoming first red and then very pale; she laid it down unopened. No notice was taken by any of the party, but in a few minutes Mrs. Aylmer got up and begged Stuart to take a stroll with her in the shrubberies. When

they were at a short distance from the house, she asked him if he guessed who Miss Herbert's note was from.

Now there are few things which Stuart Aylmer would not at that moment have preferred doing or suffering to entering on this subject with his mother; but having a very conscientious regard for truth, he answered:—

“Yes. I imagine by Miss Herbert's emotion on receiving it, that it came from Sir Felix Vaine.”

“You are right, Stuart, and you must prepare yourself for that gentleman's visits,” said his mother boldly. “It is Miss Herbert's wish that he should be allowed this privilege, and I do not feel myself justified in denying it.

“Very well, madam,” was the answer. “This house is yours, and that you may not feel yourself debarred by my presence from receiving whom you and your guests think proper, I shall leave to-morrow—but I think it my duty to suggest that if you mean

to turn the house of mourning into a house of festivity you would do well to place Isabella where she can obtain that solitude which her present state so imperatively demands."

"Good heavens, Stuart, what have I said or proposed to make you so angry and indignant? Do you think it is any disrespect to your poor father's memory, my allowing the occasional visits of a man who is engaged—and was engaged long before these terrible things happened—to a young lady who has kindly and generously consented to remain in this abode of gloom and wretchedness, for the sake of her friend and your sister, Stuart."

"I do not wish to argue the matter; only, once more, I pray you have some respect for your unhappy daughter's feelings. It is my opinion she will not be a burden on your patience long."

"I am sure," replied Mrs. Aylmer, raising her handkerchief to her eyes, "I am much more likely to die than she is, if all my chil-

dren thwart me in this way.— And where are you going now Stuart, and when do you mean to return?”

“As to where I am going, I answer—anywhere out of England it matters very little; nor,” he continued bitterly, “would I have remained so long in a place which everything has combined to make me detest, had it not been that I knew my presence would be some sort of restraint on you and Lady Digby, and force you to preserve an outward decency of conduct at least. However, I can bear it no longer, and if my father’s memory must be outraged, and my wretched sister’s feelings insulted, it shall not be while I am by. As to when I shall come back, I answer—not for years, perhaps never! And now you had better return to your guest, and tell her that the coast will be clear for the reception of her lover to-morrow. Be kind enough to convey my adieux to the party in the dining-room; I shall spend the evening with Isabel, and start at nine o’clock



to-morrow. Fanny will be up to make breakfast for me, I dare say."

And without waiting for his mother's answer, Stuart turned suddenly down a side path, leaving her to return and communicate the success of her unworthy stratagem to her favourite daughter.

Eva's note, which she did not open until she found herself alone, ran thus—

"MY SWEETEST FRIEND,

"Affairs of importance obliging me to come into Derbyshire, I have asked and obtained Mrs. Aylmer's consent to my paying you a visit. May I hope that a small portion of the pleasure I experience in the prospect of this meeting, will be shared by you. To-morrow, about twelve, I trust my adored Eva will be prepared to receive and welcome her anxious and devoted friend,

"FELIX VAINE."

Scarcely was this loverlike billet glanced over, when Eva, tearing it into the smallest

fragments, crushed it passionately beneath her feet. She was awakened from a dream, and the cold and bitter wakening proved how deep and delusive that dream had been. If any one had told her during the last two months that she was happy, the very idea would have been scorned by her; and yet now, she felt from the very bottom of her soul that it was so. It is true she had in all this time enjoyed but little of the society of him, she still, alas! so fondly loved, for Stuart rarely appeared except at the stated meal times of his family. Indeed Eva could not fail to perceive that from the first day of his return he had studiously avoided her. "And yet, and yet," she murmured, while pondering on the past, "I saw him every day, I heard him everyday, and everything else was forgotten. Yes, Heaven forgive me for it, I *was* happy. But now," and she glanced at the scattered fragments at her feet, "now what a change. I must meet that man again, and again try, oh how vainly try, to love him.—Love

him!" she repeated, half smiling, though bitterly enough, at the thought, "if I could but school myself to regard him with anything short of abhorrence, I should be thankful, and less miserable than I am." And then a hundred wild and impossible schemes flitted across her mind for dissolving this hated engagement; but, as in former cases, it was all in vain. There stood her solemn vow, and there stood Sir Felix, an ardent, determined, and, more than all, *needy* lover; small hope was there that he would ever give her absolution from a promise so desperately obtained; and other way of escaping, in spite of all her never-failing efforts, she could find none.

For some hours Eva sat alone, feeling quite incapable of mixing in any society. At length Fanny joined her.

"Eva," she said, in her now constantly subdued and mournful voice, taking a seat near her friend; "my brother is going away to

morrow, and he bade me say farewell to you for him."

"Going so soon, Fanny? you do not mean it. Why should he go at all?"

"He has not been very communicative to me, Eva, but I am sure he dislikes the idea of visitors being admitted at present."

"But what visitors? does he mean old Mrs. Nathan, the woman who came the other day?"

"It is probable he would not, if consulted, have had even her admitted, but I think his present displeasure—forgive me, Eva—is concerning Sir Felix Vaine."

"What, he knows that he is at Elmhurst?"

"Yes, and that mama has given him permission to call."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Eva, "and I have been so selfishly absorbed in my own feelings as to have forgotten that others might be displeased and pained by his coming; but surely it can be yet prevented."

Fanny mistook the meaning of this speech, and so replied, somewhat coldly.

“No, Eva, it is perfectly natural that in your own pleasurable anticipations you should forget everything else; and it would be too hard upon you, who have for two months shared our entire seclusion, and sincerely sympathized with our affliction, if we expected you longer to do so; besides,” continued Fanny, who really loved Eva dearly, and felt truly grateful for all her kindness, I do think it would have been difficult, under the peculiar circumstances of the case, to have refused Sir Felix Vaine’s visits, especially as we are all so deeply indebted to him for having saved Stuart’s life.”

“Saved his life!” Eva began indignantly, but she stopped herself, and only added: “but if your brother thinks he should not come, I am sure he must be quite right.”

“It would be too late, Eva, now to think of that, for mama gave her permission before she even communicated the request to Stuart. Poor

Stuart," continued the sister, with tearful eyes, "my heart aches to see him in the state he is. He did so love poor papa, and I know he feels always, what is in fact the case, that it was to spare him, that our dear, dear father sacrificed himself."

"Do not allude to these things, dearest Fanny; you know that is not the way to strengthen your mind and enable you, as you would wish, for your mother's and Isabel's sake, to shake off the dreadful despondency that has been growing upon you."

"Oh, but, Eva, I may succeed in concealing my feelings, but never, never can I know happiness again."

"Nay, Fanny, I must not let you talk in that way. How is Isabel this evening?"

"Worse, much worse, since she has heard that Stuart is going. Oh, what shall we all do when he is gone!"

"And do you really mean to tell me," said

Eva, "that your brother leaves his home simply because Sir Felix Vaine is to call here?"

"Oh, no, no, I did not say that was the only cause, Eva; I am sure Stuart would not be so unreasonable; I know he is anxious to see poor dear Alice."

"Oh, that is it," answered Eva in a low voice; and she made no more observations on the subject.

## CHAPTER VI.

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*Julia.* But say, Lucetta, now we are alone,  
Would'st thou then counsel me to fall in love?  
*Lucetta.* Ay, madam; so you stumble not *unheedfully*."

---

SIR FELIX VAINE sat alone over his breakfast on the following morning, in the best room of the Stanley Arms. It was a very soft and delicious day; the balmy air just ruffled, without shaking off one tiny petal from the fragrant lilac and hawthorn trees that grew beneath his window, for the best private room of the Stanley Arms looked upon the well-kept garden of the inn. It was a day that Sir Felix particularly delighted in, for he was an epicurean



in all things ; and it added not a little to his present self-complacent and happy mood, that nature smiled so softly and graciously around him.

He had finished his rolls and coffee, but still Sir Felix played idly with his teaspoon, occasionally using it to rescue a struggling fly from its perilous position in the cream-jug, and occasionally trying how long he could balance the veteran bit of plate (bearing the arms and coronet of the house of Derby, to be in accordance with the *name* of the inn) on his thumb nail ; but during all this time it must not be supposed that the thoughts of the handsome Felix were idle too. This was very far, indeed, from being the case, as might soon have been discovered from the frequent and meaning smile that hovered on his lips ; and thus his meditations ran :—

“ I must positively bring this business to a speedier conclusion than my obstinate little lady-love wishes. ‘ Surely a lover ought to be

patient,' she once said, when I  
to have pity on me. Yes, fair  
can, and will, if necessary, be  
creditor won't; and I have at l  
these, like blood-hounds, followin  
No, no! a creditor will not be  
my haughty love, you must

'Cast aside your maiden bash  
For a name and for a ring.'

But now how to melt that sto  
of hers, must be my next, or r  
consideration. Some people c  
man; but at all events I am  
by vanity as to think she loves  
she shall, though, or my name  
Vaine. No, no; I have not  
convenient and expensive journe  
nor will I go away again till I  
my little beauty to her senses.  
seriously consider what new w  
cination I can employ, to ma

upon me as others do. Ay, as *others* do;" and Sir Felix Vaine's thoughts wandered back, and revelled in the recollections of his triumphs during the last few months he had spent in town; and then he took out his jewelled time-piece, and saw that it wanted yet half an hour of the time he had fixed upon to start for Elmcourt, and so he got up and strolled into the garden, that looked so fresh and pretty from his windows; and there he met the barmaid of the Stanley Arms, who, Sir Felix thought, looked fresher and prettier still; and in this company he must be left for a short time, while, for the reader's satisfaction, it may here be stated that the half hour did not hang at all heavy on his hands.

Stuart Aylmer was gone, and more than one heart was sadder in consequence. Eva had spent the morning alone, and—oh, shame, shame that it should be so, and she the affianced of Sir Felix Vaine—had spent it in tears. Fanny

had been with poor Isabel, vainly reconcile her to their brother's departure.

"No, no, Fanny," was the answer, "I cannot be comforted. I am so gentle and so kind, and I shall never see him again! How few brothers are forgiven all, as he has done."

"Nay, dearest Isabel," was the soothing reply, "how few who repent so sincerely and fully as you have repented."

"Ah, Fanny, I must repent now, for there is no repentance in the grave, when it is too late for going. But you are so good, and your heart is pure. Oh why, why, was I so hateful, hateful, France?"

In another room a far different scene took place.

"Well, *chère maman*," said Louise, as she turned from the glass, after having made the slightest *souppçon* of rouge to her cheeks, "how do you think I look

"If you were not a married woman, I should say—too beautiful for the constancy of Sir Felix, and the peace of Eva Herbert."

"I do think mourning is particularly becoming to me."

"Undoubtedly, my love; but where is your husband? I have not seen him since breakfast."

"So much the better; I hope he is out for the day. What o'clock is it, *maman*?"

"Nearly twelve, Clara; so make haste with your toilet. Sir Felix is always punctual."

"Very well, I am ready; so let us go down to the drawing-room. Now remember, *maman*, you introduce me simply as your 'daughter Clara.'"

"As you will, dearest, but I trust you have no designs upon the heart of Sir Felix Vaine?"

"Leave me and my designs to ourselves, *ma bonne*; and now *je t'attends*."

As they descended to the drawing-room, twelve o'clock struck, and in a few minutes



after, a loud peal of the hall bell announced the arrival of the expected guest. Nothing could exceed the finished elegance of Vaine's appearance as he entered. He advanced with a quiet yet deeply interesting look to greet the mistress of the house. Nothing could exceed the fascinations of his smile and the gracefulness of his manner. He acknowledged the introduction to Clara with a "Welcome, Clara." The usual topics of conversation were discussed, but in a subdued and restrained tone on Sir Felix's part, as though he wished to make the lately afflicted family forget his presence. Not come as a stranger amongst them. A quarter of an hour passed in this manner. Aylmer rose from her seat, saying, "I will inform Miss Herbert of Sir Felix's arrival; the door closed on her, and Clara were alone.

"You have been some time out," was the first observation the gentleman made to his companion.

Clara raised her large blue eyes, and answered only "Yes."

A volume of poems lay open on the table near her, which she now bent over, allowing her long fair hair just to kiss the pages and partially to conceal her face, while she thus mused to herself:—

"He is certainly very handsome, and I envy Eva Herbert more than ever. Poor Marmaduke might well be jealous of such a man. I wonder what Sir Felix thinks of me, and if he really believes I am only Miss Aylmer—a first impression does so much; and yet, after all, what does it signify? The stubborn fact remains that I *am* a married woman, and married, alas! to a fool. *Eh bien donc il faut m'amuser un peu!*"

And what were the reflections of Sir Felix during this time:—

"Egad, that's a monstrously pretty woman. What eyes, and what a complexion she has got; I would give something to know if this is the married daughter or a single one that I

never happened to hear of. If t  
may flirt with her at pleasure, and  
an excellent means of bringing th  
bert to reason; but if the latter,  
must turn away from the conte  
those dreamy-looking eyes, and  
possessor that, in spite of her  
elegance, she must not hope for  
of the appropriated heart of Felix

Clara and Sir Felix looked up  
moment, and smiled; and there w  
in that smile which convinced th  
each had been occupied in thin  
other; but this created no embar  
either side. It only established  
understanding between them, th  
ther towards improving their int  
the most lengthened and elabor  
place conversation could have done

At this moment the door opene  
Aylmer entered with Miss Herber  
Clara rose to go out with her moth



“ Well, my love,” said the latter, when they were once more closeted together, “ I hope now you have made up your mind to stay with me another month.”

“ Yes, mama, I have,” was the answer.

“ And you are not afraid of being ennuyéed any more?”

“ No, *chère maman*, I am not.”

## CHAPTER VII.

---

"That man that hath a tongue, I say  
If with his tongue he cannot win

---

EVA's reception of her lover was being as cordial as a lover in general to expect; and Sir Felix was not with it. Not that her manner had been warmer or more endearing to him, but that he had been basking lately in such an amount of flattery and praise, that the contrast struck him most unpleasantly; and he was disappointed more abruptly than he had intended of his hopes respecting the hasty union.

"I thought, Sir Felix," was Eva's quiet answer, "that I had sufficiently explained *my* wishes and determination on this point—I assure you they are unchangeable."

A slight contraction of Sir Felix Vaine's handsome brow, was the only sign he gave that he had heard what his companion said ; for he immediately went on :—

"I will not allow myself to doubt that you will listen favourably to my earnest entreaties. You have now no guardian or protector, and, believe me, this is not exactly the place for you to remain in. It is well known that the eldest daughter is at home, and her society——"

"Excuse me, Sir Felix," interrupted Eva, "I must be the best judge of my own honour ; and as you persist in importuning me on a subject about which I have long ago expressed my unalterable resolution, I shall for the future leave Mrs. Aylmer to entertain her guest, and devote myself to the society of my friend Fanny, for whose sake I am still a resident

here." And before Sir Felix could make any effort to detain her, Eva had opened the door and was gone.

"By heavens! that girl has a will be no easy task to curb," was the disappointed lover's thought, as his image disappeared. "Cold as an icicle makes my part so difficult—and your brilliant dark eyes seem as though they tell a different tale. Ay, so they could not be in a favoured one! But this shall not deter me from my proud beauty; you shall smile on me, or I will smile on none. Well, well, I will try to conquer by jealousy first, and if that is not successful, I will trust to my lucky star once more. *donc, mon brave!* When did that fail? It has never fail to triumph?"

This last mental observation was the result of his own image reflected in the mirror, in which, in the momentary irritation of his feelings, he had walked in self-solation. And, as usual, he obtained

Ah, this polished glass and its brothers were trusty friends to Sir Felix, and never yet had disappointed him in his hour of need.

None of the family again appearing, the now self-complacent baronet, after waiting a few minutes to take a last lingering, loving look at his matchless form, rang for his horse, and left the house. Riding slowly down the long avenue, Sir Felix, turned probably to see if there were any bright eyes following his retreating figure. If this was his expectation, it was not disappointed, for at the open window of a room above the one he had just left, sat a lady, who waved her white hand, and smiled graciously as her eyes met his.

“By Jove, ‘my daughter Clara’ is a sweet creature—I hope she is married”—said Sir Felix, as he put spurs to his horse (after he had passed the avenue) and galloped off.

The next day, and many an one succeeding that, Sir Felix called again; and finding in Sir Marmaduke Digby an old

though slight acquaintance, he  
additional excuse for being con-  
court, till at length he came to  
quite as one of the family; and  
never appeared on the occasion  
she had learned rather to rejoice  
at his being there, because he  
told her that it was only Sir Fe-  
society that detained Sir Marma-  
gloomy home. And the wretched  
had still a strange clinging to the  
ship of Clara, the sharer of all  
pleasurers and follies. But C-  
standing her promise to her m-  
her sister's darkened room less fr-  
and listened more impatiently w-  
there to those tones of daily incre-  
Fanny, however, well supplied h-  
would sit for hours holding the  
hand of her sister, and speaking  
and pardon, which the sincere m-  
listens to in vain; and the only



complaining that ever rose on Isabel's lips was sometimes after hearing these pure and holy truths that Fanny uttered, when she would exclaim despairingly, "Oh why, why, was I sent to that hateful France?"

And the summer advanced rapidly, and still Sir Felix Vaine lingered unrepiningly at Elm-hurst. He saw Eva nearly every day, but as yet he did not appear to have progressed one step towards inclining her to a speedier union than she had at first determined on. The flirtation scheme had failed entirely as far as regarded its effect on her. And now, as if to increase his difficulties, the health of his beautiful *fiancée* visibly declined, till Dr. Northcott, who was at last called in, ordered immediate change of air and scene for the invalid. Eva did not hesitate a moment in choosing where to go.

"Dear, dear Glandale! what joy I feel at the thoughts of seeing it again," she said to old Janet, while giving her directions about the

journey. That same evening she wrote two letters, one to Mrs. Dacres, begging her to let her out for a small house for her mother in a village as possible, and another to Mrs. Dacres, entreating that lady, if she could, to let her stay there.

When Fanny heard that Eva was going to Glandale, a faint flush rose for a moment on her cheek; but it passed away as she thought, and she said, quite calmly,

"But you promise to come to me, my dearest, when you are better?"

"Yes, Fanny, unless, as I said, you are enabled to come to me."

"That will never be. I could not leave Bella, even for you, my own sister. She is learning to feel some kindness in my society, and while she lives I shall be by her side."

"What a dear, good girl you are! I am sure you deserve to be happy, and I will be, too."



A low sigh was the only answer, and the friends separated.

Sir Felix had not called all that morning, and consequently knew nothing of Miss Herbert's sudden plans. After Eva had written her letters in the evening, she put a shawl round her, and walked out into the shrubberies alone—Fanny being then with Isabel.

She had not proceeded far when a footstep sounded on the gravel path behind her, and turning round she beheld, to her great annoyance, Sir Felix Vaine !

"My dearest Miss Herbert," he said, tenderly, "surely you do wrong in walking so late as this, in your delicate state of health. Pray take my arm, and let me lead you to the house."

"Thank you, Sir Felix," replied Eva, "but I am very well protected against the cold with this large shawl; and I never find walking at this hour unpleasant or injurious to me, especially when I am alone."

...are consulted  
...about your

...you, that  
...require."

...Sir Felix,

...of coun-

...to listen

...my wife at

...of pri-

...health;

...amusement

...quietly

...in his

...having said

...that I have

...of which

...

...of which

...from

...of air for

...object in the

...continued, looking

up at her companion for the first time since he had joined her, "if affection really prompted your present offer, believe me, I thank you sincerely, although I cannot accept it. But if you had any less worthy motive, let this information be its reward. I have made arrangements for going in a day or two to Glandale, the place where I spent my earlier youth. Miss Stanley, with whom you are acquainted, will most likely join me there; but if not, I have other friends in the neighbourhood. And there I intend to remain till my health is perfectly re-established."

"I am obliged to you, Miss Herbert, for this explanation," was all Sir Felix said; but

he had just exhibited at her words. For though she felt that she must eventually fulfil the destiny that had bound her to a man she detested, there were yet six months of freedom before her, and these months she was to pass in those ever-cherished scenes endeared to her by so many memories. There was yet another reason too, that made her rejoice at the idea of being again at Glandale, and this was the thought of Edward Dacres and Fanny. Of the sentiments of the former she knew of course very little, but of those of the latter, of her own dear Fanny, she had no doubt whatever. For although, since the recent horrible events in their family, her friend had never named his name, Eva felt as fully convinced as if he had been made the constant subject of their discourse from morn till eve—that Fanny loved him still. And therefore, to bring about a union between her and the young rector was now her ardent wish.

And while she was turning all these things

over in her mind during her solitary walk, the highly-incensed Sir Felix wandered in a distant part of the shrubberies, for his mind was at present in too unsettled a state to allow of his seeking the society of any other member of the family. To account for the extreme irritability with which Miss Herbert's communication had been listened to by him, it must, in justice to Sir Felix, be told, that he had that morning received several letters which distressed him exceedingly. In fact, many of his creditors were dunning him unmercifully, and everybody knows that this is enough to irritate the sweetest temper in the world. The report of his intended marriage with an heiress, had quieted these harpies for a while, but their patience had been waning fast, and they now took courage to inform the baronet that if their claims were not immediately attended to, they should proceed in the usual course against him.

To answer these agreeable announcements

Sir Felix had been detained at home all the morning ; and he arrived at Elmcourt in the evening, with a desperate resolution of bringing matters to a crisis. It has been seen how his efforts were again foiled by the quiet but firm determination of his future bride, and therefore it must be forgiven him that he now walked with long and passionate strides, and even occasionally clenched his hands and bit his lips while musing on his unfortunate circumstances. But much as the thoughts of his pecuniary embarrassments distressed and annoyed him, it is not true that the present vehemence of his gestures and lowering of his brow arose entirely from the recollection of those. If any one had required him on his oath to declare the principal cause of his great discomfiture, there is no doubt he would instantly have replied, without believing himself foresworn.—“ Those confounded duns.” But no, no, Sir Felix, you do not yet quite know your own heart ; for that which galls and frets it most, that which casts the

deepest shadow over your little world, is—wounded vanity! You are obliged at last to confess that yours powers of fascination are not omnipotent; that there does exist in the same world with yourself a human being, *a woman*, whom all your arts have failed to win. This is your plague-spot, Sir Felix, but where is the cure? Not half so eager was the call of Richard, on on the battle-field,

“A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse,”

as the yearning cry of the soul of Sir Felix Vaine for some salve to its wounded pride!

On he walked, and came at last to the little summer-house, shaded by acacia trees, that has been mentioned before; and here he entered, and sat down. On the rustic oaken seat lay a book; he took it up, and found it was a volume of Pope's works, with the leaf turned down at a passage he remembered having told Lady Digby he particularly admired. “She at least

appreciates me," he thought, and one wrinkle disappeared from his brow. A minute after, Clara herself stood before him.

A well-acted start announced that she wished him to believe she had come hither by accident. "I had no idea you were at Elm-court," were her first words. "Why have you hidden yourself here, Sir Felix?"

"Nay, I did not flatter myself, my absence would be remarked by any one; indeed Miss Herbert is the only person I have seen since my arrival."

"And how came she to allow you to escape so easily?—some lovers' quarrel, perhaps, and I do wrong to intrude on your solitude—might I trouble you, Sir Felix, to hand me that book which is by your side?"

If Clara intended by this to recal the thoughts of Sir Felix to herself, she succeeded perfectly, for as he handed her the volume, his countenance brightened, and he said—

"I see you have sought out the poem I



mentioned to you. I trust you have not been disappointed in its merits."

"Disappointed, Sir Felix?" and for a moment Clara's eyes were bent upon the ground, while a faint and very becoming blush fortunately arose upon her cheek. "Oh, no! I admire the poem excessively."

Sir Felix had risen on the entrance of Lady Digby, but as the latter now sat down herself, he took a seat beside her, and continued—

"How delightful it is to find our own ideas and conceptions of the beautiful shared and responded to by another; I never experienced this charming intellectual pleasure till I knew you, dear Lady Digby."

"You honour me greatly, Sir Felix," replied Clara, turning over the pages of her little book.

"Nay, that is a cold expression—I thought we had been warm friends."

Clara made no reply, and he continued—"I

have, perhaps, been too presumptuous idea. Am I forgiven, Lady Digby?

Clara raised her beautiful blue eyes in the chastened light of the setting sun, more soft and dreamy than ever, and almost in a whisper,

“There is nothing to forgive, Sir Felix.”

And the scarce-concealed expression in his speaking eyes proved the balm Sir Felix had been yearning for.

“How soothing and delicious is this twilight hour,” he now said, as his eyes had again relapsed into silence; “what influence could always last.”

“It is, indeed,” answered Lady Digby, as she rose as she spoke, and sighing departed to walk towards the house.

Sir Felix was by her side in an instant.

“Dearest Lady Digby, you are unhappy. Oh, that sorrow should enter that gentle heart—but it cannot be helped. Youth and loveliness, a husband who

you, and whom—you love,” he continued, after a moment’s pause.

Another scarcely audible sigh followed, and he went on. “Is it not so? you love your husband, or wherefore should you have married him?”

“*J’ai cru l’aimer,*” was the low but distinct reply—and the rest of their conversation was in whispers.

## CHAPTER VIII.

---

"I stood again in my early home,  
And every well-known spot  
Endeared by memories of the past  
With swelling heart I sought."

---

THE morning arrived for Eva's departure, and she hailed it gladly. Miss Stanley had written a most affectionate letter expressing her readiness to meet her young friend at her arrival, and to superintend her temporary establishment there; and Charlotte Dacres had also, by her mother's request, to inform Miss Stanley that Sweet-briar Cottage being then vacant, they had secured that for her. This was very satisfactory indeed, and

faint flutter of pleasure at her heart, in reflecting on the perfect peace and tranquillity she should now for a few months enjoy at her own dear Glandale.

She had not seen Sir Felix alone for a moment, since the evening when he had last met her in the shrubbery; indeed, she had purposely avoided him; but on this morning he arrived at Elmcourt to breakfast, and it was thought very natural and proper that he should do so. The carriage had been ordered at twelve o'clock, and at half-past eleven Mrs. Aylmer, with Sir Marmaduke and Fanny, who were the only ones of the family present at table, got up and left the room, thinking the lovers might like to say their adieux alone.

"I conclude, Miss Herbert, you will allow me the honour of writing occasionally to inquire about your health?" said Sir Felix, drawing his chair rather nearer to where Eva sat.

"I can have no objection to your doing so,"



was the quiet reply ; and then I took her little watch from her bosom, and in half an hour, and rose from her seat.

This perfect and unmistakeable manner of rebuffed Sir Felix more than the most direct reproaches would have done, and he was struck by some asperity—

“ I believe there is yet six months before, according to your own declaration, you will be entitled to claim the fulfilment of my promise. At the end of that time, if I have not returned, you may expect me at Gloucester. I know, Miss Herbert, we both regard marriage as a sacred thing.”

“ Undoubtedly, Sir Felix; but it is not my thankless office to remind a person of his promises and fortunes.”

Sir Felix bit his lips, and went to the window, while Eva moved towards the door.

“ Good bye, Sir Felix ; I thank you very sincerely for all your kindness and consideration.”

"And I am equally grateful, Miss Herbert, for yours."

And thus the imagined lovers separated.

Eva went immediately to Fanny's room, and found her there alone, looking even more pale and dejected than usual.

"Ah, Eva is it you?" she said, as her friend entered. "Is Sir Felix gone?"

"I don't know, Fanny; I left him in the breakfast-room — but what ails you, darling, that you look so sad and pale?"

"I am very unhappy, Eva; a thousand miserable forebodings of evil haunt me, and you are going, who, for the last year and more, have shared and sympathized with all my troubles; and I have no other friend in the whole world."

"My own Fanny, do not talk in this way. You know the slightest wish of yours would make me fly from the farthest end of the earth to your side; and even now I will not go, if my going makes you unhappy."

“Do not mind me, Eva; I would not for worlds you should stay when your health requires a change, and we shall write to each other constantly. Ah, there comes your new travelling carriage, Eva — what a very pretty one it is,” continued Fanny, who saw that she had communicated her own depression to her friend, for Eva’s tears were now falling fast. But her endeavours to change the subject did not succeed.

“Do not speak of carriages just now, dear Fanny. Tell me why you are so unhappy?”

“Have I been otherwise for the last three months, Eva?” was the mournful answer. “But however, why should I conceal from you, that your intended journey to Glandale has recalled the time, the strangely happy time, when we were there together? And oh, Eva, he, my poor, dear papa was with me then !

“But you were not happy all the time, Fanny,” said her friend, thinking it better that the bereaved daughter should dwell on the



disappointment attending a love affair, than on his memory whose death had been so terrible."

"No, Eva, that is true, but my happiness was even greater than my subsequent wretchedness, and therefore I dwell, or rather I did dwell, oftener on the former. But latterly, you know, my mind has had no room for remembrances of any kind but one, and Heaven forgive me that I have (since your journey has been planned) thought a little, a very little, Eva, of *him*."

"I shall see Edward frequently, Fanny."

"Yes, yes, but what is that to me? Even if he should love me, Eva, which I know he never, never will, no power on earth could tempt me to leave poor Isabella. Papa's last words to me about her sound continually in my ears. And if he had not spoken thus, I should still act in the same way. No, no; do not talk or write of Edward Dacres to me, Eva."

"It shall be as you wish, dearest. And now, heaven bless and make you happy, my good,

sweet Fanny. Be sure you write.  
And Eva turned hastily to conceal  
tried in vain to suppress.

"One moment, Eva," said Fanny,  
tell you I had heard from Stuart.

"Indeed, and where is your letter?"

"In Naples; and he has seen  
her health is much better, and  
a physician who has attended her from  
hope that her mind may yet be restored."

Must it be told that Eva did not  
this intelligence. But who could  
depths of the human heart? She  
affianced to another; she felt a  
that to Stuart Aylmer she never  
than she at present was; and  
heard of the possibility of her  
she had always feared as a rival  
ran through her heart, and her  
to utter one word of satisfaction  
communication. Fortunately, Fanny  
her silence, for Janet now came

was ready, and Eva, hurrying her adieux to the rest of the family, in a few minutes more was seated weeping in the carriage with something of the same feeling at her heart that had often before prompted the words, "I would I were that pale faced-cousin Sir Felix had not again appeared, and his future bride mentally resolved to banish, as far as she was able, all thoughts of him, till the dreaded time arrived when it would no longer be possible to do so.

On arriving at the end of the journey, which from the delicacy of the invalid's health had been more protracted than usual, Eva was agreeably surprised to find Miss Stanley already established in Sweetbriar Cottage.

"How very kind of you, my dear Miss Stanley," she exclaimed, as that lady stood to receive her in the cool porch thickly tufted with honeysuckle and sweetbriar. "This is more than I expected—when did you arrive?"

"Yesterday morning, my Eva; but come in now, I have a thousand things to say to

you. Janet will attend to the  
your carriage, and all the rest  
me good to see the old woman  
once more—and yours, dearest  
at you again. Ah, we must co  
a few more roses into those pale  
you leave Glandale.”

“Oh, I have no doubt the br  
dale will effect a perfect refor  
my appearance and my health,  
as she allowed her old friend t  
her of her travelling cloak and  
place her on the sofa, which M  
drawn close to an open windo  
the woods and valleys, that s  
loved so well. And as the l  
enjoying the perfume from the  
flowers with which the little gar  
and looked upon those dear and  
softened by the mellow light  
sun (for it was evening when  
while listening to the kind voice

and steady friend Eva Herbert felt a greater degree of happiness than she had known since her forced engagement to Sir Felix Vaine.

“ And have you seen anything of the Dacres since your arrival?” she asked of Miss Stanley, after the latter had been giving an account of her own journey, and Eva herself had answered all her questions relative to the late events in the Aylmer family.

“ Yes, Mrs. Dacres and Edward both came yesterday, without knowing I had arrived, to see if everything was comfortably prepared for you. It was they who hired the servants that are here now, and had the garden put in order, and in fact did everything that has been done to render this long untenanted place a fit abode for the rich and beautiful Miss Herbert. That’s what the old lady called you.”

“ And Charlotte?”

“ Oh I have seen nothing of her, thank goodness. I imagine her coming back brought little gladness to their quiet home. Mrs. Dacres told

me, with tears in her eyes, that 'dear Charlotte'—conceive any one calling that girl 'dear'—that 'dear Charlotte' was sadly altered since her visit to Elmcourt; and the poor old lady asked me many questions respecting her daughter's acquaintances there. Of course I did not tell her what I know to be the fact, that 'dear Charlotte' was desperately in love with the exquisite Sir Felix Vaine. But you can pardon her for this, can you not, Eva?"

A slight contraction of Eva's polished brow, and a scarcely perceptible drawing up of her graceful person, convinced Miss Stanley that she was venturing on forbidden ground; and so, although her natural curiosity was raised to the highest pitch, to know why it was that Eva invariably avoided the subject of her future husband, she changed the topic at once.

In a few minutes after Eva rose, and ringing for her bonnet and shawl, told Miss Stanley she had one visit to make before she slept that night.

"A visit, dearest Eva? and you so tired from your journey—where can you possibly be going?"

"Do not attempt to stay me," she replied gently. "I am going to my uncle's grave."

## CHAPTER IX.

---

“ Oh, with such glory evermore before us,  
Does it not seem as if contentedly  
We might remain amid sweet sounds and sights  
And dream away our fond and harmless lives ? ”

---

THE next day, Eva attended by Miss Stanley, visited many of her former haunts, and already a tranquillity she had long been a stranger to, seemed to be stealing imperceptibly into her heart. There was one spot, however, which she carefully shunned, exciting her friend's curiosity excessively thereby. When they had walked nearly as far as the invalid's strength at present permitted, Miss Stanley observed, “ But you have surely forgotten your favourite



glen, Eva; shall we go there now? "No," was the answer, "I would rather not go there yet; and when I do go, it must be alone."

On reaching home, they found Mrs. Dacres and Charlotte waiting for them; the former all smiles and anxious inquiries, the latter all gloom and sullenness. After they had been some time seated, and the usual chit-chat of a country village sufficiently discussed, Mrs. Dacres asked Miss Stanley a question relative to some alteration in one of the upper rooms, which she had given orders to be made, and the latter immediately offered to go with the thoughtful old lady to ascertain whether the workmen had followed their instructions. For a few minutes, therefore, Charlotte and Eva were left together. Their last meeting alone had been on that night when Charlotte came to Miss Herbert's room, to demand if the report of her engagement to Sir Felix Vaine was true. This strange interview was fresh in the minds of both, and rendered their present *tête-à-tête* extremely

awkward. Eva was the first to break the silence that had followed the departure of the two elder ladies. "You have not left Glandale, I suppose, since your return from Derbyshire, Miss Dacres?" she said.

"No, Miss Herbert," was the answer.

"The parsonage must be looking very pretty now, I should think, with all the roses in bloom?"

"I seldom go into the garden."

"You prefer more extended rambles perhaps?"

"I rarely walk at all."

"Is that possible! I am sure if I were living at Glandale I should dream half my time away among those dear woods and valleys."

Charlotte looked in her companion's face for the first time since they had been alone, as she replied bitterly—

"Everybody has not such a happy future to dream about as you, Miss Herbert; and none knows so well as yourself of what nature

*my* dreams are likely to be. I have no need to go to the woods and valleys to learn the extent of my wretchedness."

"I am sorry indeed——" began Eva, but Charlotte interrupted her.

"Bah! the happy are never sorry. Why should you be sorry for me? *he* never was," and then checking by a strong effort the tears that in spite of herself had risen to her eyes, she continued, in a quiet, altered tone, "and when are we to congratulate you on becoming Lady Vaine?"

"I do not know, Charlotte," was Eva's gentle answer, for her companion's evident unhappiness had touched her deeply, and she had no inclination to be scornful in return.

At this moment the other two ladies entered, and Mrs. Dacres and her daughter immediately took their leave.

When Eva, a day or two after, called at the parsonage, Charlotte did not make her appearance; her mother said she was ill, and the ex-

cuse was readily accepted. Edward was there, but he too seemed unusually depressed and out of spirits. Eva spoke much to him of Fanny, but although he listened and replied to all she told him, his thoughts were evidently with his unhappy sister.

Soon after the return of the latter to Glandale, her brother had discovered that she was changed, and his own experience led him to guess the cause. He had never questioned her on the subject, because he well knew that Charlotte was the last person in the world to admit a confidant, but for all this, he felt a perfect conviction that his sister loved, and loved hopelessly. Earnestly and untiringly he had striven to lead her mind to purer sources of happiness; eloquently and enthusiastically he had spoken to her of that hope and peace which religion brings, and which the trials of life disturb not. Faithfully he had pointed the way to brighter worlds, but still Charlotte refused to follow it.

If he asked her to read any particular book on the subject of infidelity, she would always comply, but when, after keeping it a few days, she returned it to her brother, he knew at once, by the expression of her face, that her heart was still darkened, her soul still unsatisfied about all that concerned it most to know. And each day Charlotte's look grew gloomier, and Edward's hope for her decreased; and the mother, though she guessed not half that her son did, still saw that her daughter was miserable. The old woman said little, and went about her daily avocations as actively and zealously as ever, but there was no more joy in her heart, and their fireside was a sad and cheerless one.

And as the bright summer advanced, it was all the same; in vain for them the woods and valleys became clothed with beauty; in vain their own little garden became, with its glowing roses, the envy and admiration of all who passed it—sorrow had entered their dwelling, and the glories of nature were unheeded.

A hint of this Mrs. Dacres had expressed to Miss Stanley, and now, Edward now told to Eva as he walked back with her and her friend to ~~some~~ cottage. Fortunately he asked no questions relative to Charlotte's supposed attachment: for these, Eva would have found most difficult to answer; but she perceived at once that he guessed something of the sort ~~around~~, and that he was hopeless of any ~~result~~.

"~~Then~~ Edward," said she to Miss Stanley, when the young rector had parted from them at their garden gate, "how changed he is. Surely ~~Charlotte~~ is very selfish to allow those who love her to see her unhappiness."

"~~Charlotte~~ is no favourite of mine, as you well know," was the answer, "but I think in the present case, her unhappiness is too real to be easily hid."

"Nay, I believe the deepest misery—heart-misery I mean—can be concealed, if the object ~~is~~ wishing it so is sufficiently strong."

"Perhaps you are right, Eva; I dare say you know more about all affairs of the heart than myself. You remember I predicted that Fanny Aylmer would never get over her attachment to Edward, but she appears to have done so."

Eva did not reply to this, for at that moment she was thinking of Charlotte Dacres, and wondering how the man *she* herself so detested could have inspired such a deep and absorbing passion in the heart of that singular girl. "Oh that our destinies were reversed," she said to herself; "I could be content to live for ever quiet and alone at dear Glandale, if I were but freed from Sir Felix; and Charlotte, if her lot were mine, would imagine herself perfectly blest."

"Your meditations do not seem agreeable ones," said Miss Stanley, as Eva tore a beautiful flower that had just bloomed in the cottage garden, somewhat rudely from its stem, "and

yet the world esteems you the favourite of nature and of fortune."

"The world is not always correct in its judgments, my dear Miss Stanley—but I am very tired, so let us go in."

It was by a great effort of firmness on Eva's part, that she always withstood her companion's indirect inquiries as to the state of her feelings. It would have given her immense relief to have poured out her whole heart, to have said, 'I am bound by a half extorted vow, but from my very soul I despise and abhor the man I am to marry.' But she felt that such a confession, though a momentary satisfaction, would only aggravate her misery hereafter, when she was indeed united to him for life; and therefore she determined, cost what it would, to keep her wretchedness to herself. And the weeks passed tranquilly and swiftly by, too swiftly Eva thought, for each one brought her destiny nearer. Her health, which had improved considerably during the first month,



again became delicate, and sometimes, in moments of great despondency, she believed, and rejoiced in believing, that death would claim her as his bride, instead of Sir Felix Vaine.

Miss Stanley at length grew really alarmed about her; but Eva resisted all her solicitations to call in advice. "I shall soon be better," was her constant prediction, but the mournful smile which accompanied it belied her words. In the murmuring glen, after she had once summoned courage to visit it, most of her time was spent, and she always went there alone. No book assisted her now, as in former and happier times, to while away the summer days, but she sat on the grassy banks for hours musing on the destruction of those bright, visions which had once peopled the solitudes for her and made a paradise of this lonely spot. The voice had come, and its whisper sank deep into her soul. "Youth's visions are never realized," but an aching void was left where

hope had once made its home, and the young in years became, or thought she had become, the old in heart.

One evening, while sitting in the hermitage that has been mentioned before, Eva was startled by the sudden appearance of Edward Dacres and Miss Stanley together. The former held a newspaper in his hand, the latter carried a letter. But previous to explaining why they came, and what news the paper and the letter contained, it will be necessary to take a short retrospect of the events that had occurred during the last few weeks at Elmcourt.

## CHAPTER X.

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“ He had a frank and pleasant look,  
A cheerful eye, and accent bland.”

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WHATEVER the business was that brought Sir Felix Vaine to Elmhurst, it was not yet completed ; so at least it appeared, for a month after Eva had gone, he was still seen every day walking or riding towards Elmcourt. He had suddenly discovered that his “ old friend Digby ” was a “ monstrous pleasant fellow.” Now it has been hinted before, that Sir Marmaduke Digby was a man whose wits were never likely to come in his own, or any other person’s way. Speak to him of his “ fine

estate," his "taste for the arts," or his last poem (for Sir Marmaduke was an inveterate rhymmer, and showed his miserable effusions to everybody who would take the trouble to read them), and his heart was won at once. Sir Felix was not long in making this discovery and acting upon it, and so he became a prime favourite with Mrs. Aylmer's son-in-law, and a constant visiter at Mrs. Aylmer's house.

"My love," that lady would say to Clara, as day after day his ring at the house bell was heard, "my love, that is your husband's friend, I suppose;" and Clara would answer quietly,

"I suppose it is, mama."

Occasionally Sir Marmaduke himself thus addressed his wife:—

"My dear, I beg that you will pay every attention in your power to my friend Vaine; he is a very superior man indeed, and I shall certainly invite him to Digby-lodge (about which he speaks in raptures) when we return

there. I conclude you will have no objection to this?"

"Of course your friends are mine," the wife would meekly reply and her husband believed her unusual deference arose from her having discovered the high esteem in which he was held by Sir Felix.

Various trifling circumstances had conspired to bring this friendship between the two baronets to the state of perfection at which it had now arrived. In the first place Sir Marmaduke had one day taken Sir Felix to Digby-lodge, and among other cheap articles of *vertu* that had travelled with him from different parts of the continent he exhibited to his friend a double row of miserable plaster of Paris casts, representing goddesses and ancient heroes, indiscriminately grouped with Louis Philippe, Mr. Canning, Joan of Arc, the Duke of Wellington, Napoleon Buonaparte, and other modern favourites of image-venders, with which he had lined his entrance hall.

"These," said the triumphant lover of art, looking round on his statues, "these, Sir Felix, I flatter myself are worth coming a few miles to see."

And Sir Felix, though he had some difficulty in preventing himself from laughing outright, knowing that they could all be bought at five shillings each, was loud in his admiration, and even advised the baronet (probably with a view of ascertaining how far his gullibility would go) to put a paragraph into the county paper inviting the neighbouring gentry to come and look at them. Far from guessing he was being quizzed, Sir Marmaduke was delighted with the suggestion, and actually adopted it, to the great amusement of Sir Felix and all who understood the peculiar foible of the owner of Digby-lodge. Every morning he walked over to his house, to ascertain how many persons had called during the previous day to admire his statues, a book being left on the hall table for the insertion of their names. Sometimes he

was there himself to receive them, and their admiration, real or feigned, gave the silly baronet extraordinary pleasure. And looking upon Sir Felix as the author of all this distinction, he naturally felt considerable gratitude, and welcomed him on all occasions accordingly. Then Sir Felix had succeeded in getting one of his new friend's poems inserted in a magazine ; and the poet's rapture when he saw his own verses with his own name at the end of them, in print, was something beautiful to witness.

Surely all this will sufficiently account for the friendship that had grown between the two baronets, or at least the cause of it on one side ; for that on the other, the reader must be content to await the explanation, if he is not satisfied with Sir Felix Vaine's own words, that "Digby was a monstrous pleasant fellow."

Whenever the fair Clara looked dull or cross, or threatened to leave Elmcourt, her mother would say, "I think, love, we must invite your husband's friend to dinner to-day : Mar-

maduke will be pleased." Or, "Suppose you take a little drive this morning, Clara, your husband's friend will be here by and by, and he will be your charioteer."

On one occasion Fanny, who now seldom left her eldest sister, remarked to Clara on the frequency of Sir Felix's visits, adding, "I can't conceive what he comes for, now Eva is away." And Clara replied carelessly, "Oh, Marmaduke and he are great friends."

Fanny believed her and when Isabella complained that Lady Digby had rarely visited her of late, said by way of excuse. "The fact is, Clara is constantly occupied with her husband's new friend, Sir Felix Vaine." Then Isabella, clasping her thin hands, exclaimed in a tone of sincere anguish, "Oh, I feared as much; and can nothing be done to prevent this?"

Fanny looked the surprise she felt; but the more worldly taught Isabella forbore to sully



her young sister's pure mind by the suspicions that had entered her own.

"Beg Clara to come to me soon," she said faintly; but Clara came not, or at least came not alone, and the warning words the penitent had meditated, remained unspoken. During this time Isabella daily, almost hourly, grew weaker and Fanny's attentions to her increased. All the long day she would sit unmurmuringly by the sufferer's side in her darkened room, and either read or talk, or remain silent for hours, as the invalid's wayward fancies dictated; and though the bright summer sun that streamed even through the thick blinds wooed her to go out and enjoy its brightness, she seldom stirred till the evening shadows came, when Isabella sometimes walked for half an hour in the shrubberies too.

On one of these evenings, as the sisters were returning slowly through a thick plantation of laurel trees, that bordered the side of the shrubbery which was only separated by a low

wall from the park, and opened into it by a small iron gate, they were surprised at hearing whispering voices in eager debate, apparently very near them. Isabella tried to drag Fanny faster on, but trembled so herself at the thoughts of being seen by strangers, that she was soon forced to sit on one of the benches that the gardens abounded with.

"It is only some people in the park," said Fanny soothingly; "perhaps two of the servants."

"No, no, Fanny, just listen how eagerly they are talking. I know they will come this way and see us."

"Then if you fear this, dear Bella, lean on me, and we will try to get on faster."

At that moment, a key was heard turning in the lock of the little gate which was nearly opposite to where they sat, and as soon as the thick trees that intervened could be passed, Mrs. Weatherspoon and Clara stood before them.

## CHAPTER XI.

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"This is the hour that Madam Silvia  
Entreated me to call and know her mind;  
There's some great matter she'd employ me in."

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THIS was the first time since her father's death that Isabella had seen, or been seen, by any one besides her own family; and though Mrs. Weatherspoon was a person who in former days she had looked upon as too insignificant and vulgar to notice, even when they were in the same room—yet now, now, when she felt her own state so altered, the sudden appearance of this once despised woman, made the blood rush impetuously over her face and neck, and a fearful trembling seize her. It was evident that the

meeting was equally unexpected by the new comers also, for Clara looked exceedingly vexed, and Mrs. Weatherspoon herself coloured almost as much as the unfortunate Isabella.

“Surely this is very late for you to be out, my dear Bel,” said Lady Digby, to relieve the silence that had followed their coming.

“We are just going in,” answered Fanny, for she knew her sister could not reply; but here Mrs. Weatherspoon found her tongue.

“Bless me, Miss Isabella, you do look ill, but I’m monstrous glad to see you, my dear, though I was a little taken aback just at first. Don’t run away, I’m an old friend you know, not a bit of squeamishness in me; shan’t mind seeing you at my own house some day when Mr. Weatherspoon’s out; a little change! my dear, do you a world of good—speak to mama about it eh?—some *talk* a vast deal about Christian charity and all that sort of thing, others *practise* it—what, you are going? well good by, my dear, mighty glad to have seen you.

"Take care of your sister, Miss Fanny, she looks dreadful pale indeed."

"And well she may, Mrs. Weatherspoon, to hear you talk to her in the way you have been doing," said Clara sharply, as the forms of her sisters slowly disappeared among the laurel grove.

"Good gracious! what have I said?" began the lady in much consternation.

"Oh, never mind now, Mrs. Weatherspoon, it would be so entirely impossible ever to make you understand what you have offended in, that I have no intention of trying. Of course you meant well—I know all that? so pray let the subject be dismissed, as we have so much more that is important to speak of."

"Oh to be sure, Miss Clara—I mean Lady Digby—I'm quite ready to attend to your instructions again; but your mama and your husband and all will know now that I have been here."

"And if they do?" Pray give me credit for

sufficient wit to find some plausible excuse for our *tête-à-tête*. The pattern of one of my French caps, or a peep at Marmaduke's last verses, anything of this sort will suffice to explain your seeking an interview with me."

"Dear, yes, to be sure it will—you are so clever, Lady Digby."

"Of course ; but never mind my cleverness now ; your own is at present the subject in question. Are you disposed and able to give me the assistance I require?"

"Good gracious, Lady Digby, you are so hasty. Can't you allow me a little time to think of your proposal? I am sure I never did such a thing in all my life before."

"Were you ever offered fifty pounds for doing anything in your life before, Mrs. Weatherspoon?"

"Why no; and to be sure fifty pounds is a pretty little sum, and would be invaluable to me just now, for Weatherspoon is grown monstrous stingy of late, and actually only allows

me two shillings a week to buy all my clothes, with the exception of a new gown at Midsummer and a new bonnet at Christmas ; and these I am only to have on the condition that I ask him for no extra money between times."

"Poor woman, I pity you. But fifty pounds will set you all right for the present."

"To be sure it will. Good gracious, what lots of things I can buy, that I have been wanting so long. But then, is it right to——"

"For pity's sake, spare me your reflections, my good Mrs Weatherspoon ; I must be the best judge of what is right for me to do."

"And you *would* do it, whether I assisted you or not."

"Of course I should ; so set your troublesome conscience quite at rest on that point. The only difference, if you refuse to assist me, will be that somebody else gets the fifty pounds."

"Refuse ? good gracious, I never spoke of refusing ; I was a *leetle* surprised at first,

because I thought you were so happy with your good gentleman; but la! one never knows what's in people's hearts."

"And there's no occasion that one should. It's quite enough if we know what's in our own. I rather imagine I am not the first woman in the world, who has grown tired of her husband in less than a twelvemonth."

"Bless your heart, no; *I* can answer for that. But I should almost think you were the first who ever took such pains as you are going to take, to get away from him."

"That's my own concern, madam," said Clara, haughtily. "If I prefer going abroad without having the fuss and ceremony of a formal separation, surely I may please myself. Besides, I doubt if my husband would consent to a separation at all, for he will lose all interest in the thirty thousand pounds papa left me, which was fortunately settled exclusively on myself. As long as we live together, of course he enjoys it conjointly with me; and being almost as fond



of money as your 'William,' it would be a hard struggle to induce him to give it up ; therefore you see the plan I have adopted is the only rational one. And now, for the last time, will you do what I require ?”

“ I will do my best, Lady Digby.”

“ Nay, I want neither your best nor your worst, but a simple following of my instructions. In the first place, you must hire for me a lady's-maid—I cannot trust the one I have—and be sure she is not pretty, Mrs. Weather-spoon ; I hate pretty servants ; so mark me, if I find a blooming nice-looking girl, our bargain is at an end. She must be tidy and quiet, and able to dress my hair and all that. This is all I require. Do you understand ?”

“ Oh yes,” was the answer, and Lady Digby we

“ Then you must call to-morrow morning (I will see that you are admitted) and express a wish to go to M—— on the following day to make some purchases. I will offer to drive you

over in the pony phaeton in the evening—it is not above seven miles from Elmhurst. My new maid must be there to meet us, and then your task is finished. A chaise and post horses will be waiting for me at M——, and you will only have to drive the ponies home again, with fifty pounds in your pocket.”

“ But I can’t drive!” exclaimed Mrs. Weatherspoon, almost crying, as she reflected that through this inability she might lose her promised reward.

A hasty expression was on Clara’s lips, but she repressed her impatience, and only said, “ Then we must think of some other plan.”

“ I can walk back, if you please,” said the submissive agent, “ and you might leave the carriage at some livery stables, with orders to send it to Elmcourt the next day.”

“ Well, that will do better, as it will be late before you reach home. You must say you left me in the carriage, while you went into a shop, and that on coming out, I was

nowhere to be found—or let them think what they please, it will be too late to act then.”

“ Oh dear! I hope they won’t ask me many questions. I shall be sure to look red and confused, and all that.”

“ You may look green if you please, Mrs. Weatherspoon. It will be a matter of perfect indifference to me, for by the time you have walked your seven miles, my four post horses will have carried me, I hope, four times as many in a contrary direction.

“ Good gracious, you talk as if you were a young girl going off with a lover, instead of an unhappy wife escaping from a husband she is tired of. Won’t you find it very dull going all that way by yourself?”

“ I have no fear of that, Mrs. Weatherspoon,” replied Clara with a slight smile, “ but, once more, let me tell you that the fewer comments you make, the better pleased I shall be. It is getting late now, so you must go; and be sure you don’t forget to call to-morrow.”

"I am not likely to forget, Lady Digby," replied Mrs. Weatherspoon, with an expressive look; "I am sure I don't want Sir Felix Vaine to bring a note again before I am fit to be seen. Good gracious, what a flutter I was in this morning, when I heard such a thundering rap at the door, and our maid of all-work out, and nobody to let him in but myself."

"Oh, never mind, I dare say he never looked at you," said Clara impatiently; "I did not choose to trust my note to any of the servants."

"He *did* look at me, Lady Digby, I assure you, and said something vastly pretty, about ladies never appearing so interesting as when engaged in their domestic duties. Lord, my dear, if you had but seen me. I had been in the kitchen making some Scotch cakes, 'scones' they call them, for Weatherspoon's breakfast, who sometimes has a fancy for taking this meal in bed; well, I was literally covered with paste and flour, like a miller, even my front all awry (for be sure I ran to the glass

the moment he was gone), a faded scarlet dressing-gown on, a dirty blond cap with yellow ribands, and an old pair of slippers belonging to my husband. I made a thousand apologies, and said I had just been *superintending* the making of some pastry for dinner; but lord, my dear, if he believed me he must have thought that the cook and myself had been amusing ourselves with pelting flower and paste balls at each other. I wouldn't have had such a thing happen, no, not for my next week's allowance—which is little enough, goodness knows. But do, dear Lady Digby, explain to him that I do not generally spend my mornings in the kitchen. I know he is a dreadful quiz—but I shall wear my new jonquil-coloured muslin next Sunday to church; it's vastly becoming to me, and I hope when he sees me in that, he will lose all remembrance of the lamentable figure I cut this morning, in my miller-like costume."

"I have not the slightest doubt in the world

that he will," replied Clara, amused, in spite of herself, at her companion's vanity; "but now, my good Mrs. Weatherspoon, you positively must go; I will let you through this gate again into the park."

"Well, good night, dear Lady Digby, I hope I have done nothing wrong in consenting to assist your flight. To be sure it is a shocking thing to live with a husband one's tired of, particularly," she continued to herself, as Clara impatiently locked the gate on her, "particularly when one is allowed only two shillings a week, with a gown at midsummer, and a bonnet at Christmas, and these on such conditions that it is the next thing to impossible to comply with."

Clara slowly retraced her steps to the house, and found when she arrived, all the family in much consternation, on account of the sudden and alarming illness of Isabel. Dr. Northcott had been hastily summoned, but forbore to give an opinion till the fainting-fits which had

rapidly succeeded each other since Isabella came from her walk, had in some degree abated. These, however, continued for many hours, and when at length they did subside, the patient sunk into a deep sleep, and the physician left her, promising to come again early in the morning.

Lady Digby shared Fanny's labour of watching by their sister during the night, and it was about six, when she went to her own room. Even then, though pale and weary, she did not attempt to sleep, but after lying down for a couple of hours, arose, dressed herself, put on a large shawl and straw bonnet, and went out into the shrubbery.

The morning was most lovely ; not a cloud disturbed the pure deep blue of the summer sky ; which seemed like a type of eternal bliss, when not a shade of sin or suffering, not a cloud of earthly passion shall interfere to mar its perfectness. No sound was heard save the wild and exquisite music of the lark, as it

soared into the depths of the stainless sky, as though disdaining to waste its heavenly melody in an atmosphere less pure than that. And the flowers were raising their lovely heads heavy with night's shining dews, as if to catch the last sweet notes as they melted from earth away.

There was much in this scene of nature's calm awakening to make a light heart lighter, a pure soul purer still. None who had come out on that glorious morning to worship nature in its tranquillity, but must have felt in contemplating it, more fully blest, more deeply thankful for creation than before. But, alas!

“ 'Tis not to list to the waterfall  
That Parasina leaves her hall.” ;

Neither was it to listen to the lark, or to watch the opening of the flowers, that Lady Digby wandered this morning in the shrub-beries alone.



It is not the joy of an enthusiast at beholding the passing loveliness of the earth, nor the rapture of a devotee at looking on the perfect works of her Creator, that brings the deep flush into her cheeks as she approaches the laurel grove. But it is reached, and there is no "Ugo" to welcome her.

Clara sat down on the same seat where she had found her sisters the preceding evening, and a low sigh rose from her heart. "Poor Bella!" she murmured, while a tear, a *real* tear rolled down her face. "We have, indeed," she continued, "been companions in folly, and now, now, we shall be companions in——Ah is it sin? I know not, but this I do know, we are the victims of circumstances, and it is we who bend to destiny, not destiny to us. Well then, why should I be sad! Nay, it is childish weakness *now* to look back—I will not, I do not, I am happy, very happy."

At that instant a bird from a tree above, poured out a flood of thrilling melody, till all

the grove was filled with its joyousness, and Clara, covering her face with both her hands, exclaimed passionately, "No, no, *that* is happiness, and I am *not* happy."

The sound of a key turning in its lock was now heard, and drawing her bonnet closer over her face, Clara arose to meet and welcome Sir Felix Vaine!

"I am glad you are come," she said, as he took her hand and led her back to her seat, "so glad to be released from the companionship of my own thoughts—in truth, I am in wretched spirits this morning."

"Nay, my Clara, why is that? Is not nature smiling most sweetly upon us—the very birds seem to be rejoicing in our loves—what, still sad? Surely nothing has gone wrong with our plans?"

"Oh, no," said Clara, rousing herself to smile on her lover, "everything has hitherto succeeded admirably. Mrs. Weatherspoon would do far more than I have asked of her, for fifty

pounds; though perhaps when she discovers who my companion is, her heart may smite her for the deed. The poor woman is bent upon captivating you, next Sunday, in a canary coloured gown, or something of that sort; and there will be only a vacant seat! Alas! poor Mrs. Weatherspoon."

"And alas! I echo, for a great many more mistresses and misses too of the good town of Elmhurst, when their eyes shall rest upon that same vacant seat," said Sir Felix, stroking his whiskers complacently.

"Upon my word, Sir Felix, your constant allusions to your own powers of attraction, is in wretched taste. Whatever the subject in discussion may be, you are quite certain to lead it to your own manifold fascinations and conquests. Let people find out these things for themselves, and you may depend on it, they will think the more of them."

"Lovely teacher, you shall henceforth guide me in all things," was the answer.

"I should be sorry to undertake an office half so troublesome—but we are trifling now, Sir Felix, and this is no time for it," continued the lady. "Have you done what, yesterday, you promised me?"

"I have, and here it is for your approval," said Sir Felix, taking a letter from his waistcoat pocket.

Clara ran her eye hastily over the few lines of which it was composed, and then returned it to the owner. "And has this cost you no pang, *mon ami*?" she asked.

"None, dearest, none, for as I wrote it,

'Still I thought of thee.'"

"And when will you send it, Sir Felix," said Clara. "I think," she continued mischievously, "it will be kind to put the poor thing out of misery as soon as possible—don't you?"

Sir Felix winced at this, but he replied

cheerfully, "Nay, I hope the chains are not so galling but that she may bear them yet a few days longer. The letter shall be sealed and sent by your fair self."—And he bent towards Clara to whisper the rest, but she suddenly started up, exclaiming:—

"I must go now, I forgot to tell you that my sister is very ill. You will come by and by as usual. Marmaduke has a thousand things to say to you. He was regretting yesterday being out when his friend Vaine was here."

"Ah, poor Digby," responded his dear friend, and the lovers separated.

## CHAPTER XII.

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“Come near, I'll softly speak the rest!—  
Alas! 'tis known to all the crowd,  
Her guilty love was all confest;  
“And his, who so much truth avow'd,  
My faithless friend—”

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ALL that day Isabella continued in a very precarious state, and the doctor's looks were grave. Towards evening, however, she seemed to get a little better, and expressed much gratification at Clara's attention, who had been with her since the morning. Mrs. Aylmer had said once on entering the invalid's room, “My dear Clara, your husband's friend is in the library.”

“Then let my husband amuse him,” was the answer; “I shall remain here.”

It was only when Mrs. Weatherspoon called, that Clara went down stairs, and on re-entering her sister's room, she observed carelessly, "I hope you will be better by to-morrow evening, dear Bel, for I have promised to drive Mrs. Weatherspoon to M—— in the pony phaeton—she bored me so."

And the morrow evening came, and Isabella still continued to rally slowly; so when Mrs. Weatherspoon arrived, 'then the phaeton was ordered, and Clara, ready dressed, entered her sister's sick room to say good by.

"You will not stay away long, dearest Clara," said the poor invalid. "I have so much to talk to you about, now that I am a little better. And you look horribly pale yourself, I fear the night air will be bad for you."

"I hope Mrs. Weatherspoon will not keep me very late," replied Clara, turning away her head; and she took her sister's wasted hand and kissed it, murmuring, "God bless you, Bel," in so mournful and earnest a tone,

that both Fanny and Isabel were startled at its contrast to her usual manner of speaking. But she hurried from the room, and silently took her seat by Mrs. Weatherspoon's side in the carriage, without seeing either her mother or her husband.

After Clara's departure, Isabel, by the aid of an opiate, sank into a quiet sleep, and when she awakened, her first question was, "Is Clara returned?"

It was then seven o'clock, and they had started at five, so Fanny replied,

"They would have had no time to be back yet, and I know Mrs. Weatherspoon always takes very long to do her shopping; so we must give them at least another hour."

Another hour passed, and slowly enough too, and at the end of that time, Isabel, who had not spoken once in the interval, again said to Fanny, who never quitted her, "Go, dear, and see if Clara is returned."

Fanny went, and soon brought back the in-



telligence that their sister was not yet come. "But it is still quite light," she added, to ease the evident anxiety of the invalid, "and Clara drives so well, and the ponies are so quiet, that there is not the slightest danger of any accident.

"Oh, I am not afraid of *that*," said Isabella, but her restlessness momentarily increased.

At length nine o'clock struck, and Mrs. Aylmer began to share the alarm of her eldest daughter. Fanny proposed sending to Mrs. Weatherspoon's house, to see if Clara had rested there. It was not more than half a mile from Elmcourt to the village, and the messenger soon returned, with Mr. William Weatherspoon's compliments, and he had neither seen or heard anything of his wife or her companion, since they started.

Isabel nearly fainted when this was told to her; but still Fanny strove to give comfort.

"They probably feared a thunder storm," she said; "the evening has been so very warm;

and Clara's companion is a dreadful coward. Hark! some large drops of rain are beating against the window now. I dare say they have remained at M——, and sent a messenger for a close carriage."

"That is very likely indeed," replied Mrs. Aylmer; but Isabel did not speak, and the former lady continued, "I will just step down to Marmaduke; he is alone in the library, where he has been waiting all the evening for his friend, Sir Felix, and communicate this suggestion of Fanny's, in case he should feel any alarm about his wife."

But Sir Marmaduke Digby felt no alarm whatever, for he was perfectly unconscious of the lapse of time, having been the whole evening engaged in the composition of an Ode to Friendship, which his friend (who doubtless inspired the theme) had promised, if it was finished by the following day, to get inserted in one of the best and most fashionable magazines.

How could a poet give one thought to a wife at such a time ?

When Mrs. Aylmer entered the library, she found her son-in-law sitting before a small table, with a lamp upon it ; one hand supported his head, while in the other he held a pen ; his eyes were fixed intently on a sheet of foolscap that was spread beneath them, and his brows were knit in thought.

“ My dear Marmaduke, I hope I do not disturb your studies,” said his mother-in-law, as she walked up to his little table.

“ I am most happy indeed to see you, Mrs. Aylmer,” was the answer ; “ it is true the trifling work I am now engaged in, must be finished by to-morrow, but that is of no consequence whatever ; do not allow this knowledge to prevent your staying. Pray be seated, and——”

“ Oh, not for the world, Marmaduke, would I take up your time ; I only came to see if you were uneasy about our dear Clara. Fanny has

suggested that the fear of a thunder-storm has probably detained them; and this is so likely, that my alarm is entirely dissipated, and I am thinking of ordering the horses to be put to the carriage, and sending it to M—— for them."

"Oh yes, certainly," said the poet, in a very absent manner. "I suppose they are quite safe. Friendship is like the early dew—one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight—eight feet. You can't think of a good rhyme for dew, can you, Mrs. Aylmer? something a little original, eh?"

"I fear not, indeed, Marmaduke; I have a shocking head for rhyming, and never made even a couplet in my life."

"Bless me, how odd; but we have not all the same gifts. Now a phrenologist would tell you that you were deficient in the organ of imagination. I have it very strongly developed. It is not long since I had my head examined by a professor of this interesting

science, who was travelling about and giving lectures. I said to him, 'Now, sir, if you can't discover by the formation of my brain that I am fond of poetry, and occasionally indulge a little in rhyming, I maintain that your science is all delusion.' 'Sir,' he replied, fixing his eyes on my forehead, 'Imagination is so powerfully developed there, that unless you endeavour to check it, I will not answer for the consequences.' He was a clever man," continued Sir Marmaduke, "though rather presuming, for the next day he wrote me a note asking me to lend him five pounds and buy twelve tickets for his farewell lecture. But, as I was observing, all have not the same gifts, and indeed imagination it not the only thing required in writing poetry. A poet must have a correct ear for the number of feet or syllables in each line. I pique myself particularly on never making any mistake in this. But to give you an example, I will repeat to you the whole of my best poem. It is called, 'The

Orange Grove ; or, Confidence Betrayed,' and then you will see that I have not deceived you about the carefulness of my style."

"My dear Marmaduke, you are too kind," replied Mrs. Aylmer, moving towards the door ; "nothing should induce me to take up so much of your time ; I am perfectly convinced that all you have told me respecting your style of writing poetry is true. Indeed, I have heard Sir Felix speak of it with admiration. Another time, when you are less busy, I shall be only too happy and proud to listen to 'The Orange Grove.' At present I must positively deny myself this pleasure, and go to the girls again, who are childishly alarmed about their sister."

"Dear me, I am sorry for that—all the effect of an unoccupied mind. Let them both sit down to the composition of a sonnet, and I'll answer for it, they will have no room for fears or fancies of any kind."

"But, Sir Marmaduke, it is late for ladies

to be out alone, and the rain is now pouring in torrents."

"True, true. I wonder what can have detained them. But I have just hit upon a rhyme for dew; excuse me, Mrs. Aylmer, I will write it down—'hue,' that will do capitally! There are now three lines complete—

' Friendship is like the early dew,  
That glistens on the summer flow'r;  
It lends to earth its heavenly hue—'

Now for the last line. Surely there must be many words to rhyme with 'flower,' if I could but think of them. Perhaps you, Mrs. Aylmer——"

But Mrs. Aylmer was already outside the door. "Good heavens," she said to herself, "no wonder poor Clara should take refuge in any society from such an unexampled bore as that. I fear the contrast Sir Felix presents must be too dangerous—I will look more to this——"

Her meditations were interrupted by a violent ringing at the house bell, and as she was at that moment in the hall on her way from the library, she hastened herself to answer it, fully expecting to see her daughter—but no Clara was there. A figure that might either be that of a man or a woman, so complete was its disguise, presented itself, and the moment the door was well opened, rushed in. Mrs. Aylmer uttered a loud scream as the hall lamp fully revealed her strange visitor. It (for the gender was still undetermined) wore a bonnet covered over with a dark shawl, one end of which hung down and concealed the wearer's face; a man's tattered coat was thrown over its shoulders, beneath which peeped a yellow shawl; the legs were clothed in a pair of corduroy trousers, that, being very ample, allowed room for a green silk gown and sundry petticoats to be tacked in, and to crown all, it carried in its hand a huge stick.

Mrs. Aylmer's scream brought Sir Marma-



duke from the library, and several servants from various parts of the house into the hall. The figure had sunk panting on a chair, and now it spoke.

"Well, I believe I am safe at last, but good gracious! what a run I've had!"

"Mrs. Weatherspoon!" ejaculated several voices at once, while the servants, one and all, turned their faces towards the wall. Mrs. Aylmer commanded them to retire, and then asked with some degree of anxiety concerning Clara.

"Oh la, oh la, don't you see I am wet through?" was the answer. "It will be my death, I know it will, and I suffering from rheumatism too; let me have a little drop of something hot, and these dripping clothes taken off, and I will then tell you all I can."

"Surely Lady Digby has met with no accident?" asked Sir Marmaduke.

"Good gracious! what an idea—I am sure I hope not—I indeed have——"

"For heaven's sake, Mrs. Weatherspoon,

“speak out at once; where is Clara, and where is the carriage?” said Mrs. Aylmer impatiently; you can tell us your own adventures afterwards.”

“La, my dear, I don’t want to tell my own adventures,” replied the poor woman, beginning to cry. “All I know of my Lady Digby is, that I missed her and the carriage while I was in a shop, and after looking in vain through the streets for half an hour, I started to come home on foot. And a pretty reception I have met,” she continued sulkily, rising as she spoke to go and change her strange attire.

“Oh, then,” said Mrs. Aylmer to her son-in-law, “doubtless our first suggestion was correct; Clara is waiting for the carriage at M——. I shall order one to go for her immediately. Now come, Mrs. Weatherspoon, with me; your wants shall be instantly attended to. Don’t alarm yourself, Marmaduke; the dear girl will be with us in about two hours.”

"Perhaps, Mrs. Aylmer," suggested the husband, "I had better write a note to send with the carriage, explaining to Lady Digby the utter impossibility of my accompanying it, which she might otherwise expect. You are aware that the ode must be finished by to-morrow, and I have made but little progress at present. I expect my friend Vaine, too—he was to have been here before now."

Mrs. Aylmer gave a sudden start, and turned pale. At the mention of Sir Felix Vaine and his expected visit, a strange thought had shot through her mind. But she had too much command over herself to give it utterance; so turning calmly to her son-in-law, she said,—

"Yes, do write, Marmaduke, and you had better make haste about it; the carriage will soon be ready."

After installing her half-offended guest in a comfortable room, with a good fire, giving her plenty of dry garments, and ringing for spirits

and hot water, Mrs Aylmer proceeded to her daughter's room, promising Mrs. Weatherspoon to come back in a few minutes and listen to her adventures. She found the sisters in the greatest anxiety, having heard of the arrival of Mrs. Weatherspoon alone, and Fanny had just been proposing to go down and gain fuller particulars than the servants had been able to give, when her mother entered. "Go," said this lady to her youngest daughter; "go, Fanny, to Mrs. Weatherspoon; she will be angry at being left by herself, Clara is quite safe; I am going to stay with Bella."

As soon as Fanny's footsteps had quite ceased to be heard along the passage, Isabel started up in bed, and grasping the hand of her mother, who had taken a seat beside her, said in a clear though hollow voice—"Mama, do you suspect nothing?"

"Hush! hush! for Heaven's sake, Bel, and let no one hear a whisper of such a thing. But I do suspect, nay, I feel a conviction that it

is so. Do not speak it, do not mention his name. Oh God! that two daughters——”

Mrs. Aylmer paused, as a groan smote on her ear, and the next moment the wretched mother was bending eagerly over her apparently lifeless child; for Isabel had fainted!

In the meantime, Fanny hastened to Mrs. Weatherspoon, and found that lady disencumbered of her corduroys and coat, which lay dripping on the ground at her feet, while she herself was seated comfortably in an easy-chair sipping her warm glass, with every appearance of returning good-humour.

“ Well, Mrs. Weatherspoon,” said Fanny, as she entered, “ what is this about Clara? How comes it that we see you alone?”

“ Lord, Miss Fanny, don’t force me to tell all that over again. I dare say my Lady Digby will be here presently. They are going to send a carriage for her, and, my dear, I think it had better put me down at my own house in passing ;

I'm dreadful tired, and William will be in a fine state about my long absence."

"Certainly, Mrs. Weatherspoon," replied Fanny. "I will ring, and order them to let you know when it is ready."

"Yes, my dear, I shall be monstrous glad to get home. Never had such a walk in my life—didn't rain when I started though, nor till I had gone about five miles: then it began slowly, and in large drops at first, and I tucked my dress up all round me, for I have got my best green silk on you see, Miss Fanny; however, presently it came down in torrents, and I thought I heard a clap of thunder. Lord! my dear, how I did tremble all over! I'm dreadful afraid of thunder and lightning; but I trudged on, hoping I was near home. At length, when I was pretty well wet through, I came to a farm-house, where I went in and asked for shelter. They were civil enough country folks, and dried all my clothes in no time; but it was almost dark now, and I

dreaded to go on by myself. Well, Miss Fanny, they offered me a bed for the night, or, if I liked it better, one of the sons to go home with me. Didn't I shake when I heard this, and recall to mind all the fearful stories of wayside murders, and betrayed pedlars, that I had ever heard or read of—for to let you into a secret, my dear, I had fifty pounds about me. I shudder, even now, to think of the jeopardy it was in."

"But surely," suggested Fanny, as her companion paused for breath, "surely these people could not have been aware of that?"

"Oh la, my dear, who knows? Those sort of folks have queer ways for finding out everything. At any rate, 'prevention's better than cure;' and so I declined their offer, and only begged the loan of a cloak to cover my poor dress. They hadn't such a thing, they said, but in place of that, gave me those old corduroys and tattered coat. I was fit to cry when I saw them, but I fancied my host began to look cross

at my having appeared to doubt their honesty, and so, fearful of offending them more, lest they should take it into their wicked heads to murder me, I followed a grinning hussey into an inner room, and put the vile things on. Just as I was leaving the house, the master, I suppose it was, came and gave me that great stick saying, with a queer smile, 'Here, take this, ma'am. There are plenty of bad 'uns about, and those who mistake honest people for rogues, will be likely enough to mistake rogues for honest people.'

"Off I started on hearing this, and ran for the next half-mile as if the old gentleman himself, my dear, was at my heels. It still rained, and so I did not stay to take off those horrible old garments, though, I'll answer for it, I shall have the small-pox or cholera morbus in consequence. Two or three people spoke to me as I passed; but I shook my stick when I saw anybody approaching, so it was only, 'Good night, sir,' or, 'a wet evening,' that they ventured on saying. One man, indeed, who was carrying a



lantern, saw my strange dress, and began grinning, at the same time asking if he should have the pleasure of conducting me home. 'Thankee, master,' said I boldly, 'I expect to meet my husband immediately;' upon which he made off, as fast as he could go, and I started again also, and never ceased running till I reached your door. Here, my dear, I'll just take another drop before I start, for I've got the cold chills dreadful."

Fanny handed her the ingredients for a second glass of brandy and water, and by the time it was finished, two servants entered, one to summons Mrs. Weatherspoon to the carriage, and the other to bid Fanny again hasten to her sister's room. This she did immediately, and found her mother in the greatest consternation. Isabel had recovered from her fainting-fit, but still lay pale and motionless on the bed, and to all the questions addressed to her answered not a word. Mrs. Aylmer continued wringing her hands, and

cries, "It has killed her! it has killed her!" and to Fanny's repeated inquiries replied at length, "Clara is gone; ask no more, child, you will know all soon enough."

Fanny could no longer be blind to what her mother meant, but she exclaimed eagerly, "Mama, mama, you have no proof of this: it cannot be; our sister could not be so vile."

An expressive glance from Mrs. Aylmer silenced her, and she turned once more towards Isabel; a ghastlier paleness had crept over the sufferer's face, her eyes were opened to their fullest extent, and the chest heaved fearfully. "Mama," whispered Fanny, "the doctor must be sent for—she is very ill."

"She is dying!" replied the mother, with a quivering voice; "but oh! if Clara *should* return, she might yet be saved. Stay, Fanny; send first for the doctor, and then desire another of the servants to call at the Stanley Arms, and inquire for Sir Felix Vaine. Bid him not return till he has discovered whither he

has gone, and when he went. I know there is no hope, but do this, Fanny, instantly, and then come back to me."

Fanny obeyed her mother's instructions mechanically, for her mind was nearly paralyzed by all that had happened.

In half an hour the messenger that had been sent to the Stanley Arms returned with the intelligence, that Sir Felix Vaine had that evening left the inn, telling them he should not come back, and that they believed he had gone first to M——.

On receiving this information, Mrs. Aylmer hurried to her children. Isabel's eyes were closed, and thinking she slept, her mother incautiously said—"Fanny, it is true—weep child! weep! for now our family is doubly dishonoured. Clara has followed the example of her wretched sister, and they have broken my heart!"

"My mother, my poor mother! come, come," whispered the supposed sleeper, as

she half arose in her bed and stretched out her arms eagerly—"forgive and bless me, oh my mother—Fanny, my good, pure sister, pray for me, I am dying. Oh, Clara! what a death-bed you have prepared for yourself! But pray, Fanny, pray—for all is growing dark."

Fanny sank on her knees by the side of the bed, and in a voice broken by sobs began a prayer for the dying. But scarcely had the first words been uttered, when a loud shriek filled the room, and drowned her trembling accents—"Fanny, Fanny, she is gone! Help, help—Oh God! my child is dead! And Mrs. Aylmer fell senseless by the side of her daughter's corpse.

## CHAPTER XIII.

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"Through long, long years, to seek, to strive, to yearn  
For human love ; and never quench that thirst ;  
To pour the soul out, winning no return,  
O'er fragile idols by delusion nursed."

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It will be remembered that Eva was left in the hermitage of the murmuring glen, where Miss Stanley and Edward Dacres had just joined her, bringing with them a newspaper and a letter. This letter, Miss Stanley immediately delivered to her young friend, with rather a mysterious and troubled expression of countenance, and then drew Edward to some distance, that she might read it undisturbed.

Eva opened it tremblingly, for she knew the

writing was that of Sir Felix Vaine, but as she read, her whole aspect changed—and when she had got through it she laid it down, and sat for a few minutes quite still; her face pale as death, and her eyes bright with emotion. It would have been difficult for a casual observer to have known whether these signs, in one lately so seemingly cold and apathetic, denoted joy or sorrow. When Eva's two companions turned again towards her, they naturally feared the latter, and Miss Stanley went eagerly to her side.

“My dear child,” she said anxiously, “it is as we believed then—that letter contains bad news. Look up, Eva; you must not thus give way to grief. He is unworthy, indeed he is, or your regret.”

Eva neither spoke nor looked up, and Miss Stanley continued—“Edward, do you come and speak to Miss Herbert; this blow has been too much for her—dear girl! her own heart is naturally so warm and trusting. Tell her how

very little he deserved this sorrow—read that paragraph to her, do, Edward.”

Edward Dacres unwillingly advanced to comply; indeed he had been most averse to accompanying Miss Stanley at all on such an errand; but she, fearing that the intelligence the letter and paper contained, might affect her young friend (whose altered manner had lately greatly alarmed and puzzled her) in some violent manner, had shrunk from the responsibility of being the sole bearer of it, and had urged on Edward, that as a clergyman it was his place to assist her, and if necessary, speak peace to the wounded heart of the sufferer. Edward consented, but his own heart bled for the desolation he believed he was about to inflict on another; and his voice betrayed a certain degree of agitation, as he read from the paper he had brought, the following paragraph:

“Great excitement is now prevailing in the fashionable circles on account of the elopement of a certain baronet (who it was lately rumoured

had become the successful suitor of the beautiful and accomplished heiress, Miss H——t) with the wife of another baronet, the daughter of a gentleman who, not many months ago, fell in a duel with another daughter's admirer. The family is plunged in the deepest affliction by this unexpected event; the lady's husband, especially, is said to be inconsolable. Miss H——t is at present staying somewhere in the north of England."

Immediately below this, was the announcement of Isabel Aylmer's death, which Edward also read aloud; and when that was finished, Eva raised her eyes, and exclaimed with a shudder, "How horrible." Both her companions looked the surprise they felt, and she answered their looks.

"Your kindness and sympathy, my good Miss Stanley, and yours too, Edward, demand some confidence from me in return." Miss Stanley began to look wondrous pleased, and Eva went on. "I cannot explain everything



to you, but this I am sure will content you both. Although I must ever lament the way in which my escape from my engagement has been purchased, that escape itself is a source of the greatest happiness to me; and you will not doubt this, when I assure you that the first moments after reading the letter you brought were passed by me in thanksgiving to Heaven for such a release. Now leave me a little while alone."

Poor Miss Stanley was but half satisfied; she had fully expected, when Eva began speaking, some extraordinary and romantic tale concerning the latter's recent engagement to Sir Felix Vaine; and now to be told "to go!" before she had asked a single question, or elucidated any part of the mystery, was really, she thought, too bad. But the moment Eva expressed a wish to be alone, Edward Dacres took his companion's arm and gently drew her from the spot.

As soon as they were gone, Eva opened her

letter, and read it once more. It was as follows:—

“ MY DEAR MISS HERBERT.

“ The remembrance of the very slight regard on your part with which my esteem for you has always been repaid, leads me to hope that you will not resent my giving you back your freedom. This course seems to me the best for our mutual happiness that I can pursue. With many wishes for your future welfare,

“ Believe me,

“ Your sincere Friend,

“ FELIX VAINÉ.”

“ Can it indeed be true?” murmured Eva, as she dwelt with rapture on every word. “ How little I thought a letter from him could ever be a source of pleasure to me! And yet,” she continued, with another revulsion of feeling, “ I am wickedly selfish in rejoicing at an event that will bring wo to so many, and my own poor Fanny among them. How can I, how dare I,

feel this lightness of heart, this childlike buoyancy of spirit, at a joy that has been brought about by the grievous sin of another? Surely Heaven will punish me for this!"

But in spite of all her convictions that she did wrong in feeling happy, Eva could not persuade herself to be miserable. A few minutes had changed the whole aspect of her future destiny, and busy fancy rapidly pictured brighter changes still. Suddenly a rustling of the trees near her retreat, startled her from a not very unpleasant reverie. A wild and altogether unreasonable hope glanced through her mind connected with the subject of her musings, and brought the brightest crimson to her cheeks, but it was doomed to be disappointed, for the next moment a shadow darkened the entrance of the hermitage, and Charlotte Dacres stood before her.

Eva got up instantly for Charlotte's society, at no time very delightful, promised to be less so now, to judge at least by her aspect, which

was unusually sullen and gloomy. But the latter spoke in a determined tone—"Stay, Miss Herbert, a few minutes longer; I wish much to speak to you."

Eva sat down.

"I followed my brother and Miss Stanley hither," continued Charlotte, "and while they were engaged with you and the news they brought, concealed myself at the back of this place; I felt a desire which I had no power to control, to witness your reception of the intelligence that paper contained; and I have done so. I heard your words, and believed them. You are no hypocrite, Eva Herbert, and so I know that you did not love him. *Had* you loved him, we might have wept together, and your gentle tears would have mingled with, and cooled my burning ones. But, as usual, I must weep on alone, and see you triumphing in what is death to me. Ay! death to the heart, Eva, for she, that vile one, *must* love him, or how could she have renounced fame,

friends, all, for him? And think you such a passion as *this* is not well returned! Oh, it is maddening to reflect on their happiness——”

“Happiness? Charlotte, you cannot think for one moment that they are happy,” interrupted Eva, anxious for the termination of the scene.

“Not happy!” replied Charlotte, almost fiercely, “*does he not love her?*” But what do *you* know about happiness?”

“Little indeed, Miss Dacres, if it consists in pleasures like theirs. You are excited, Charlotte,” she continued more kindly; “come home with me, and endeavour to dismiss from your mind all remembrance of one who never merited your affections. Was he not always vain, and frivolous, and——”

“Stop, stop, Eva; do not drive me mad. What is all this? Say he was vain, worldly, heartless, treacherous—wicked, if you will. And what is my answer. Why only, *that I loved him!* Oh yours can be no woman’s

heart, if this seems strange to you! I tell you, that if I believed in a future state of being, I would gladly give up all my hopes of happiness in it—nay, I would accept the certainty of endless wo, to be assured that he *once* had loved me—only *once*! Eva.”

“Charlotte,” said Eva, hastily, “do not speak in that impious way, or I will go. Hereafter, when you have obtained the love of a worthier object, you will smile at your present delusion.”

“Delusion! Miss Herbert, do you call that delusion which eats the very heart away; which burns night and day, which never rests, never changes, but casts its own black hue on all around. If this is delusion, then show me what is reality! No, no, there is no delusion in the utter misery of unrequited love.” And Charlotte as she spoke sat down on the stone bench near Eva, and wept in silence for many minutes.

Although Eva saw plainly that she could do

no good by remaining, she was unwilling to leave her companion alone in such a state, and so once more she strove to induce Charlotte to accompany her home. But the unhappy girl made no reply to her entreaties, still sitting with her face buried in her clasped hands; the stifled sobs that had at first seemed as though they would burst the heart they came from, becoming every minute more subdued, till at length they altogether ceased.

Then Charlotte looked up, and her face was pale as death.

“Miss Herbert,” she said, in a strangely altered voice, “I must apologize for having made you become a witness to a scene like this—the silly rhapsodies and lamentations of a disappointed girl. A short time hence, and you will laugh, perhaps to Sir Felix Vaine himself at the rare folly of a creature like myself, ever dreaming of being loved. Well, well, it *was* a wild dream, but I have suffered: oh yes, I have suffered, Eva, more than you

gentle ones can know of. But it is right that you should learn what human hearts can endure, and I will teach you from my own. I will teach you Eva, Herbert, what it is to yearn unceasingly for sympathy and affection, to feel your very soul overflowing with love and tenderness, and never, never, to meet with any return. Oh, the world is so desolate without love! all its light is darkness, and from my childhood there has been nothing but darkness for me! Well, I will tell you about all this, Eva," continued Charlotte more wildly, "and show you too *its result*—but not now. Come, let us go!"

The two girls walked on in perfect silence till they came to the village, and then Charlotte turned to Eva, and said—"We part now, Miss Herbert, but promise to come to me to-morrow, at ten o'clock—and come alone. I never leave my room before twelve, but you know which it is—the same you used to occupy



yourself; so walk straight up and I shall be ready to receive you."

Eva willingly gave the required promise, though she thought the request a strange one. And then they parted.

## CHAPTER XIV.

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"Where art thou, death?  
Come hither, come!"

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ON arriving at home, Eva found Miss Stanley divided between anxiety at her prolonged absence and curiosity to learn more particulars concerning her recent engagement to Sir Felix Vaine. But all questions, direct and indirect, Eva evaded at present, as carefully as while the engagement existed; and only repeated what she had said before, that her release was a source of pleasure to her, without in any manner explaining why she had become engaged. And then they spoke of Fanny Aymer,

and suggested many plans for getting her to come to them.

"This must be the first thing I do," said Eva; "for while Fanny is pining, I can enjoy nothing myself."

"But surely," replied Miss Stanley, "Stuart will return to comfort his mother and sister, when he hears of this new calamity?"

"It is more probable they will both go abroad to him," was the answer. "I believe he is still in Naples."

"Ah, that is where poor Alice Norton lives, is it not?"

"Yes," said Eva, and immediately after she wished her companion good night, and went to her own room. This mention of "poor Alice Norton" had again changed the current of her thoughts from sweet to bitter—and what a fragile thing is human happiness when a word, a name, accidentally spoken, can affect it thus!

Eva scarcely closed her eyes that night, for

the remembrances of past years crowded into her mind, and mingled strangely with her anticipations of coming ones. And then she dwelt on the fate of most of those she knew, her own companions and equals, and shuddered as the conviction forced itself upon her, that almost all were miserable. And what was there in her, that she should be more blest than they? "Oh no, no," she murmured, as she sat up in her bed, and looked out on the bright moon that shone so placidly through her window; "there is no happiness on earth; and yet the heart will cling to it, even in spite of feeling that all is vanity and vexation of spirit."

A cloud passed before the moon, and Eva thought of Charlotte Dacres, and how she had once watched that moon's setting, and prophesied her own fate from it. And had not the sad prediction been fully verified? Yes, Charlotte was indeed wretched, and for her there seemed no hope of brighter days, for her soul as well as her heart was darkened.

How strange, that even the most unselfish should derive a species of consolation from the reflection that there are others whose fate is harder and more hopeless than their own. But so it is; and Eva, in thinking of poor Charlotte Dacres, began to feel that she did wrong in murmuring at the uncertainty of her own lot; and she concluded her meditations with a sincere prayer for a resigned and contented spirit.

A few hours' broken sleep succeeded, and when the bright morning sun fully awakened her, she arose with a lighter and more hoping heart; dressed herself, and descended to the breakfast parlour. As soon as this meal was concluded, she left the room, and in a few minutes entered it again, with her bonnet on.

"What, going to that everlasting glen so early?" said Miss Stanley in some surprise.

"No," replied Eva, "I am not going to the glen now—this bright and glaring sun would destroy all my illusions connected with it. My

present destination is the parsonage, to see Charlotte by her own request."

"Then pray, my love, do not ask me to accompany you."

"Certainly not; she, particularly wished to see me alone."

"Ah, what can that be for? some secret she is anxious to communicate, perhaps."

"Indeed, I do not know, Miss Stanley," answered Eva, preparing to leave the room; "so *au revoir*."

"But how feverish you are, my dear child," said Miss Stanley, returning the pressure of Eva's hand; "and now you stand in the light, I see you are dreadfully pale."

"Yes, I fear I am not very well. The marks of the chains that have so long bound me, cannot be expected to disappear in a few hours. But if I become ill, we must get Fanny to come and assist you in nursing me," said Eva cheerfully, as she passed out into the garden.

A walk of about a quarter of an hour

brought her to the parsonage. It was rather before the hour Charlotte had appointed, and instead of entering the house immediately Eva wandered round the garden, and examined more minutely than she had done since she left the place, all the old, familiar objects. And almost she could fancy that past times were come back again, as the waving trees saluted her, and the perfume of the roses filled the air around. She plucked a sprig from a shrub her uncle himself had planted, and as she looked on it, the old man's face was before her. The very day, the very hour were present now, when he had brought it home from the village, and placed it there: and so far into the past had her imagination strayed, that when she heard a step behind her, she almost believed for a moment that it was his.

The illusion, however, was quickly dispelled by the voice of Mrs. Dacres:—

“ Ah, Miss Herbert,” she said, tapping Eva

on the shoulder, "why did you not come into the house? I am very glad to see you, my dear; Charlotte told us she expected you this morning; she has not left her room yet; indeed she seldom does, before eleven or twelve; and I know she was up half the night, poor dear! for I heard her walking about, and so I shouldn't be much surprised if you found her asleep. But she gave orders that you should be sent up to her the moment you came, and that nobody should disturb her before that; therefore if you are ready, perhaps you will be good enough to go at once. I hope and trust," continued the old lady, her eyes filling with tears, "that the poor child means to open her heart to you, Miss Herbert. She is very miserable, and has been for a long time; but I have often thought if she would speak freely to some one of what troubles her, it would make her mind easier; and if you can give her the least comfort, an old woman's



eternal thanks and warmest blessings shall repay you."

"Indeed," replied Eva, "I will do all in my power, Mrs. Dacres, to comfort Charlotte, and I am quite ready to go up to her now."

"Well, do then, my dear, and I shall hope to see my poor girl come down with a cheerful face one more."

Eva ascended the stairs, and tapped gently at Charlotte's door; there was no answer, and so she opened it, and went softly in. Charlotte was lying on the bed, in her usual dress, and her face turned towards the wall. Eva, believing she slept, sat down by the window with the intention of waiting till she awoke. "Poor, poor Charlotte," she said to herself, "she is now enjoying a short respite from misery, and it would be cruel to shorten, perhaps, her only moments of peace!"

To beguile the time, Eva took up a book that lay open on a chair near the bed. It was a volume of philosophy, containing daring theories

of the principles of nature, and Eva shuddered as she reflected that studying such books as these had only confirmed Charlotte Dacres in unbelief; and she laid it down again immediately. Several others of the same description were scattered about the room, which, like its occupant's mind, was in a state of great disorder. A bible, too, was there, but it appeared less used than the rest; and a selection from all the best poets, in tiny volumes, filled a small book-case, that hung by the bed-side.

In recrossing the room, after choosing one of these volumes, Eva perceived on a table that stood in a recess, a letter addressed to herself. She started as she recognised Charlotte's writing, and read the words on the outside, "To be opened immediately." What could it mean? An undefined fear chilled her heart as she broke the seal, and began to read the following :

"The task I have imposed upon you, Miss Herbert, is I know a terrible one, but you

have a strong mind, that is one of my reasons for doing it, and another is, that I believe you have had your share of happiness in this world—in having been loved—and besides, (for why should I conceal it now?) I have never forgiven you for robbing me of the only love I coveted. I told you that when you came to me this morning, I would shew you the result of such wretchedness as mine. You see it now. You are reading the words of the dead—Do not start, or shriek. I call upon you, Eva Herbert, from an unknown world, not for mine, but for my mother's and my brother's sake, to go through your task calmly. To you I scruple not to say, I die by my own act, but oh spare *them* the knowledge. It is for this I have summoned you. I understand well the properties of the poison I am about to take, and know exactly the time I shall live after it. I must read during these hours, but the book I shall choose, is one that I would not have my brother think my last moments were employed

with ; so, if it is near me, for death may come on suddenly, take it away, and put a volume of sermons (you will find) in its place. This is a harmless hypocrisy, and will make poor Edward happy. The bottle too, which contains my midnight dose, I shall leave for you to conceal. One word more—comfort my poor old mother, and as you hope for happiness and a peaceful death-bed yourself, conceal from her the manner of my death. I am going, I know not and care not whither ; if the future is not annihilation, it must be something better than this world has been to me. Once more remember, Eva Herbert, these words are as a voice from the grave. And now farewell. It is time !

“CHARLOTTE.”

Below this was written, “If any other than Eva Herbert reads this letter, my dearest mother and brother at least will see that I have done my best to spare them unnecessary misery,”

Eva did get through the whole of this singular and terrible epistle without screaming or fainting. *How* she did so, was often after a matter of astonishment to herself; but her mind had been in a state of excitement when she came—fever was in her veins, and this perhaps gave her unnatural power.

She stood for some minutes like one stupefied; her mind a chaos of fearful images, and her whole frame trembling violently. At length she seized the letter which she had before thrown down, and thrust it into her bosom, and in doing this her eye fell on the empty bottle, which she also caught up and concealed with the letter. For in spite of the delirium of her feeling, the dead girl's injunctions still seemed to sound in her ears. That relating to the sermons was too revolting to be thought of; and so, without venturing one more look towards the bed, Eva rushed from the room. Meeting Mrs. Dacres at the bottom of the stairs, she said hurriedly, "Go instantly to

your daughter—she does not speak or breathe. Go, go !”

Without waiting to see the effect of her words, Eva hastened out of the house ; and walked with extraordinary rapidity towards home. Miss Stanley stood at the door, and the moment Eva saw her she ran quickly up, and shrieking wildly—“ Save me, save me from her,” fainted in her frightened companion’s arms.

## CHAPTER XV.

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“ He drew me closer, closer,  
But still we spoke no word ;  
And the beating of our own hearts  
Was all the sound we heard !”

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THE consequences of the exciting scenes she had gone through, acting on a mind and body debilitated as Eva's were, was a dangerous illness, which soon took the form of a brain-fever of the severest kind. For three weeks her life was scarcely hoped for, but Miss Stanley and old Janet were excellent nurses, and both of them devoted to their charge. When the strength of the formed began to fail from intense care and watching, the idea occurred to

her of sending for Fanny Aylmer. Two letters had arrived from her since Eva's illness, and the last of these Miss Stanley ventured to open.

It was short, and only spoke of her surprise at not having received an answer to her former one, and mentioned that her mother was getting better, and that Sir Marmaduke Digby still remained with them. Upon this, Miss Stanley wrote immediately, telling Fanny of Eva's illness, and begging her, if it was any way possible, to come to her friend.

In three days from this time, the affectionate girl arrived, attended only by one servant; and though reduced by suffering almost to a shadow of her former self, cheerfully and gladly performed her part in ministering to the beloved invalid. And in another week they had all the unspeakable happiness of seeing the object of their anxiety restored to consciousness, and out of immediate danger.

To Eva herself, it was a source of the



greatest pleasure to find Fanny with her again ; and the moment she was allowed to talk, she expressed all the gratitude that overflowed this fresh instance of the unselfish girl's devotion.

The first time after the return of her reason, that she was alone with Miss Stanley, Eva questioned her eagerly concerning the death of Charlotte Dacres, about which her recollection was still much confused.

"I have seen none of the family since your illness," was the reply ; " but from the doctor and nurse I have heard that Charlotte was found dead in her bed the morning you were with her ; and it is thought that the shock you experienced on finding her, you went to seek, a corpse, occasioned your sudden illness."

Eva shuddered as she asked anxiously if that was all.

"It is all that any besides ourselves know," replied Miss Stanley. "The mother and brother both believe that Charlotte died from

a disease of the heart; and the doctor who was called in confirmed them in this opinion."

"But," persisted Eva, as her memory fast brought back the fearful scene she had gone through, "was there not a letter and something else?"

"There was, Eva; but nobody saw either, but myself; and all is now destroyed. Not a single trace remains to tell the wretched mother that her unhappy child perished by her own hand."

"And poor Edward—has he not suffered greatly?"

"So greatly, that they say he will never be the same again; and Mrs. Dacres has been almost dying.—But now that you are better, dear Eva, and have Fanny with you, I shall pay a visit to the parsonage, and then I can tell you more about them."

This proposed visit was paid on the same day, and the report concerning it agitated and afflicted Eva deeply.

“Never,” said Miss Stanley, in describing it, “never have I witnessed anything so mournful and heartrending as that household now. Edward tries, but has no power to console the old woman, his own grief is so deep-seated and intense; and she endeavours, though most unsuccessfully, to hide her sufferings from him.—Ah, poor Charlotte never knew how much these affectionate beings loved her!”

In spite of all the care and solicitude of her attendants, Eva’s strength rallied but slowly, and her spirits were greatly depressed. The autumn was approaching; at all times a melancholy season, and doubly so, when the heart feels that its dearest hopes are at best uncertain of being realized, and that, ere the yellow, falling leaves are replaced again, by the gentle breath of spring, those hopes may be crushed to the very dust.

One day, as Fanny was sitting alone with her, Eva suddenly exclaimed, “Did I not talk grievous nonsense during the height of

my delirium, Fanny? I am sure people generally do so."

"You know I was not here all the time," replied Fanny, evasively.

"But when you came, I was still unconscious of everything. Do tell me, Fanny, if I ever spoke what I should not have given utterance to in my right senses?"

After a short hesitation, Fanny answered, "There was nothing connected in what you said, Eva, and there were none but friends to hear it."

Eva feared to ask more, and both were silent for many minutes. At length, Fanny looked up, observing:—

"I have had a letter from Stuart this morning." She was unaware of the inference to be deduced from this sudden mention of her brother's name; but Eva's pale face became crimson in a moment, as she felt convinced, from Fanny's unguardedness, that the secret of her heart had been betrayed during her

illness. But her friend, not noticing her confusion, continued—He speaks of returning home, for travelling has ceased to interest him; and he has some idea of getting into parliament. My last letter had evidently not been received when this was written."

"Then your brother is still ignorant of the changes in your family?" said Eva.

"The papers must have informed him of all by this time," answered Fanny; "and I dread to hear how he has borne it. Oh, that the hour should ever have come when I can bless God for my father's death!"

Never till now had Fanny alluded in the most distant manner to Clara's elopement, and a burst of tears followed this exclamation. Eva saw that it relieved her, and did not seek to soothe her yet; but from this time there was less reserve between the friends.

Eva grew more depressed after her conversation with Fanny, for she felt that the latter, and perhaps Miss Stanley too, were now aware

of her attachment to Stuart. What might she not have said during that long delirium! what expressions of tenderness long repressed might have passed her unconscious lips, and have made her an object of pity, if not of contempt, to those who heard it! These ideas haunted and distracted her mind, and greatly retarded the progress of her recovery; so that when September came, and brought with its cooler breezes no roses to her faded cheek, the physician who had attended her throughout her illness began to speak of a removal to a warmer climate being necessary.

“ Ah, then you think I shall die?” said Eva mournfully when this was first suggested; “ but tell me if it is so, for I would not, for the sake of living a few months or weeks longer, die among strangers in a strange land.”

The doctor reassured her, but bade her at the same time think seriously of his proposal. And Eva did think seriously of it; at one moment persuading herself it would be the best

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thing she could do, and the next rejecting it, as an useless fatigue, that would bring her neither health nor pleasure.

There was one reason also, unconnected with herself, that inclined her strongly to remain at Glandale. Since her convalescence they had frequently visited the Dacres at the parsonage; and the old lady always seemed to derive comfort and consolation from Fanny Aylmer's presence. The manners of the latter had become, from her own sufferings, subdued and gentle in the extreme, making her a fit and welcome companion to those who had been heavily stricken too — and it is not impossible also that to the mother of him she had loved with such a girlish fondness, Fanny's manner might have been even gentler and more tenderly sympathizing than to another. At all events, Mrs. Dacres soon attached herself entirely to the young and quiet girl, who would sit with her for hours without feeling wearied, or support her feeble steps round

the now neglected garden, where each time she must submit to have pointed out to her by the unhappy mother, whose memory was fading fast, the flowers her "blessed Charlotte" had loved the best, and which were now withered or choked with weeds.

All this Fanny did and endured apparently without a thought or hope of recompense, for Edward was rarely at home now that he saw his mother had other and better consolers than he could be; and in all the visits Fanny had made to the parsonage she had never seen him for more than a quarter of an hour at a time. But in spite of this, Eva, (who believed fully that Fanny loved the young rector still) hoped, and Miss Stanley hoped too, that it would, to use the latter's own words, "come to something." And therefore it was that they both shrank from the idea of leaving Glandale at present.

But Mrs. Ayhmer—who when the shock of poor Isabel's death and Clara's disgrace was



over, became more nervous and irritable than ever—grew tired of her youngest daughter's prolonged absence, and wrote to beg she would return immediately, and bring Miss Herbert with her. The letter concluded thus: "I think, Fanny, considering your perfect knowledge of the wretched state of my nerves, you have shown very little feeling in staying away so long. It is true, I did not miss you, while Marmaduke was here, for nothing could be kinder or more attentive than his conduct towards me; but he has been obliged to go to London on business—you need not be alarmed at this, for it is quite unconnected with our unhappy Clara—but, as I said, he is gone, and so I must have you home. Pray persuade Miss Herbert to come too; she will be less moping than you, and everything here is horridly dull. Mrs. Weatherspoon is almost the only person I see, and she is growing dreadfully stupid. The Mostyns are just arrived with their daughter, (who has been a whole season in London)

still unmarried. I suppose it will be your fate to be an old maid, for all my children turn out badly. Remember I shall expect *you*, and not a letter in answer to this. I hate to be alone now, it makes me so low and nervous; and I am always fancying I see poor Bella's miserable face. But pray never speak of this to me when you come—I suppose I shall get over it in time. With compliments to Miss Herbert,

“ Believe me,

“ Your affectionate Mother,

“ C. AYLMER.”

It was with sincere sorrow and disappointment that Eva listened to Fanny's communication respecting the contents of this letter. She at once and steadily refused to go herself to Elmcourt, but in vain she tried to persuade her friend to stay with her yet a little longer.

“ Mama is unhappy,” replied Fanny, “ and you are getting well, so my duty is plain.”

“ But indeed, Fanny, I am very far from

well," said Eva earnestly; "and so many will miss you here. What will poor Mrs. Dacres do when her little favourite is gone?"

Fanny sighed unconsciously, but her resolution did not waver; and that evening she went to the parsonage to say farewell. Eva and Miss Stanley watched her as she walked slowly from the cottage, and the latter said, "Ah, poor Fanny! I had hoped that before she left us, her little heart would have been made happy. But after all, she appears less miserable at the thoughts of leaving Glandale than I should have expected."

How blindly do we often judge of the hearts and feelings even of those with whom we are most intimate! While Miss Stanley spoke, "poor Fanny," as she had justly called her, alone now, with none to mark the despairing sigh or the bitter tear, was giving vent to the anguish that overflowed her soul at the thoughts that crowded to her mind. Till now she never knew how much of hope had

mingled with her passionate love for Edward Dacres—a love that had survived absence, suffering of many kinds, and even his apparent indifference to her. But then, little as she had seen of him during her visits to his home, there were moments when she had fancied, from some trivial act or look, that he was beginning to return her affection; and on these occasions she would say to herself, ‘I do not fear. He will love me at last.’

But now she was going; the “at last” would never come. And Fanny felt all the sinking desolation of heart that follows a conviction that its dearest hopes are blighted. How hard she struggled to force back the burning tears that came to her eyes, as the parsonage at length was reached, while the torturing thought suggested itself that perhaps she might not even see Edward again. “But I may, I may,” she murmured, pressing her hand to her side, to still the wild beating of her heart, as she tremblingly unlatched the well-known gate.

Mrs. Dacres was alone, and received her favourite as usual with the warmest expressions of affection; but when Fanny mentioned that this was to be a last visit, the old lady burst into tears, exclaiming mournfully, "Then who will talk to me of poor Charlotte, and look at her flowers; and bear with all an old, dying woman's whims when you are gone?"

"Miss Herbert will still be here," said Fanny, as she turned her eyes wistfully towards the door. "And I am sure she will do all for you that I have done, and much more too, dearest Mrs. Dacres."

"No, no, she will never seem so much my own as you have seemed; she always shudders too, and tries to change the subject, when I speak of poor Charlotte, as though a mother's doting fondness wearied her."

"Indeed you mistake her," answered Fanny warmly; "there is not in the whole world a kinder or more unselfish heart than Eva Herbert's."

“ Ay, ay, my dear, so my Edward always used to say; but lately I fancy he has thought with me, that there is another even worthier and dearer than here.”

Fanny’s beating heart alone answered this, and the old lady continued, “ Ah, Miss Fanny, you will go to gayer friends, and many will love and praise you, and you will most likely marry and live in splendour, and may be forget the days when your sweet smile and gentle voice soothed the dwellers in this lonely place. But we can never, never, forget you; and if the blessings of a grateful heart, and its earnest prayers to God for your happiness, can make you happy, then, my dear child, you shall have no cause to complain of your lot.”

Fanny’s tears flowed abundantly while Mrs. Dacres spoke, and she murmured some inarticulate words of comfort in reply, though feeling at the same time that she herself needed consolation more. For Edward did not come. The hour she had allotted for her stay at the

parsonage glided rapidly away, and yet it had seemed to Fanny, till it was really gone, the longest she had ever known. What would she not have given for courage to ask for Edward! just to ask where he was, and if there was any chance of his return. But another half hour passed, and still her tongue refused to utter the words that were every moment on her lips, and she felt she might delay her departure no longer.

“ You will say good by to Mr. Dacres, for me?” she said, with an unsteady voice, as the old lady fondly kissed and covered her pale cheek with tears. “ I am to start early to-morrow; so I dare say I shall not see him again.”

“ Oh yes, yes, Edward will see you, I know he will. And will you promise me (if it is possible) to come to Glandale some time again before I die?”

Fanny pressed the hand that Mrs. Dacres extended to her, in expressive silence, for she could not speak another word. And with a

sigh that came from the very depths of her heart, she turned her back on the beautiful parsonage of Glandale.

And now that it was all over—that the last glimmer of hope was extinct, no tears came to relieve the fearful oppression of poor Fanny's sickening soul. She only felt a wish, that grew stronger with every step she took, to die and forget it all. “But oh, to live, to live,” she murmured, “and have to struggle daily, hourly with this love—no, no, it cannot be!” And then she turned and looked again, and yet once again, at the sweet parsonage, standing in its tranquil beauty on the green hill, and seeming, in its calm repose, to mock her passionate misery. “Oh, for some quiet spot, where I might hide myself from all eyes! To be alone. I must be alone!” And instead of proceeding towards home, Fanny turned with sudden energy to go to the Murmuring Glen.

By a strange coincidence, it was on that very day the previous year, that she had first gone,



in all the light-hearted joyousness of a heart untouched by sorrow, to look at that sweet spot! She suddenly remembered it, for the date of that day had been firmly engraven on her mind, and a yet more hopeless depression stole over her spirits. "One year, only one year!" she said to herself. "I could fancy that ten had passed away, and each one borne with it a heavier weight of suffering. How brightly the world was opening to me then—how blessed I was in a father's devoted love; how gladly my heart sung in the consciousness of hopes yet undefined, but full of bliss—and now, now:—

'Where is he, and where are they?'

The place itself seems changed, and yet the trees are as bright in their coloured leaves, and the brook sparkles just as it did then. The change, the fearful change, is in myself—now I see things as they really are—*then* my romantic hopes coloured and irradiated all I looked upon!"

“ And is thy dream so soon over, Fanny Aylmer? Has life already taken from thee all that life has to give? Can hope and joy be dead in a heart so young and pure? Oh no, no! that heart may still sing and rejoice, for its strings are yet unbroken; their tone may be duller and harsher for a time, for tears have fallen over them; but the hour that comes to many when the heart-strings snap never to unite again, has not come to thee.—So lift up thy drooping head once more, and say not that life is a burden!”

Fanny walked on till she came to the well-remembered hermitage, and there—oh joy un-  
hoped for!—in the self-same spot where he had sat twelve months before, sat Edward, Dacres now. Did he too remember this anniversary? Fanny feared not, but still Mrs. Dacres’s words—“ But lately I fancy he has thought with me, that there is one even worthier and dearer than hers”—flashed across her mind, and brought a slight blush to her

cheek, and something like renewed hope to her beating heart, as Edward eagerly rose to greet her.

“I have just come,” said Fanny, after her embarrassment had partially subsided, “to take a last look at the sweetest spot in all Glendale, for I am going away to-morrow. I left my adieux to you with Mrs. Dacres—not expecting to see you again.”

The blood suddenly fled from Edward’s countenance, but he said nothing. And as if by a common impulse, they sat down together on the long mossy stone.

For some time they both continued as silent as the twilight, which was stealing over the grey hills at the eastern boundary of the scene. And what was there in that silence to make Fanny’s heart beat so strangely, and Edward’s cheek flush and blanch again? It was that emotion which follows the first mutual knowledge of mutual love.

Fanny’s words had split like a spell the

barrier which had rendered their late intercourse artificial ; for the sudden agitation of her companion, and the strange glance that met her own, when she told of her intended departure, created a mutual intelligence of affection, which made them both silent for the time.

The long golden rays of the sinking autumn sun were sparkling on the valley brook—pouring on the sere-leaved woods around the place, and steeping them in a quiet glory, like that which surrounds the setting of a good man's life—the thrush was singing out its even-song from the brushwood in the glen, and the wood-pigeon was giving a voice to the solitudes of the forest hills.

A struggle was going on in Edward's mind of a nature that made silence grateful to him, while Fanny's heart was fluttering with tumultuous hopes, that made the scene around appear less real than a dream.

Slowly came the twilight on; slowly its

shadows cast a dimness on the brightest spots of the glen. • But Fanny was unconscious of all these changes, for her soul was drinking in the tones which she had so long panted to hear.

And deep and passionate were those tones in which Edward Dacres declared his love: and simple and noble were the reasons he gave for his having struggled against it. And very low was the voice in which Fanny replied, until words became unnecessary between them,

“ And the beating of their own hearts  
Was all the sound they heard.”

## CHAPTER XV.

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"Methinks it should have been impossible  
Not to love all things in a world like this!"

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"WHAT an immense visit you have paid to the parsonage, Fanny," said Miss Stanley, who was sitting alone in the parlour when the former entered.

"I have not been there all the time" said, Fanny quietly. 'I took a walk to the glen."

There was something in the tones of her voice that instantly struck the penetrating Miss Stanley, and she replied eagerly—

"You have seen Edward Dacres—is it not so?"

"Yes, I met him at the hermitage," answered Fanny, with as much composure as she could assume; "but I must go now and attend to my packing. Is Eva up stairs?"

"I believe so," said Miss Stanley, greatly disappointed that she was not to be the first to hear whatever Fanny had to tell. And the latter left the room and went immediately to her own.

Here she could sit and ponder on the dream-like change that had come over her destiny in the last few hours. Here she could kneel and pray that such sudden and unlooked-for happiness might not make her heart cling too fondly to this world, and that in the present blessedness, the effects of the ordeal of suffering she had gone through, might not pass from her mind; and here too she could recal every word and look of the beloved, and fondly picture to herself the days when they should part no more.

After she had been thus employed about half

an hour, Eva entered the room. "Why Fanny," she exclaimed, "I thought you were attending to your packing, and I find you gazing at the moon! What does all this mean?"

"It means," replied her friend, drawing a chair for Eva, close to her own, "it means only that I can think of nothing but of thankfulness to Heaven, and of *him*. Yes, Eva, I cannot conceal it from you—Edward, I may call him *my* Edward now, loves me. Oh! I fear but that I am too happy. All the past, the fearful past, recedes, and those events that I thought would never be absent from my mind fade away into nothingness before the words 'he loves me,' that are ringing in my heart. Is not this sinful, is it not selfish idolatry, Eva?"

"No, Fanny, I think not," was Eva's thoughtful reply. "You have been deeply tried for one so young, and now you are to have your reward. God bless you, Fanny,



and make you always as happy as you are at this moment. And now tell me your plans for the future, and where you mean to live, and everything about yourself and Edward; with your fortune he will have the means of purchasing a much better living than that of Glandale."

"And do you think, Eva," said Fanny warmly, "that I would ever consent to leave Glandale? to live anywhere but where I first saw Edward! Oh no, no; our home will still be here—and yet it seems almost too great a happiness for me."

"But your mama, Fanny? will she consent to your marrying an obscure country clergyman, and burying yourself for life in this secluded spot?"

"I do not fear that she will interfere in the matter, because she always said I was too unfashionable to make a good match—besides, when she sees Edward, she *must* love him, you know? I am so anxious too, that Stuart and he

should meet; they at least are quite certain of liking each other."

"And when do you expect this meeting will take place?" asked Eva.

"Oh, soon, I hope; for Stuart speaks of returning in a month or two. Poor dear Stuart! he writes in wretched spirits; but then he has no one to console him. I shall be so glad when he comes back."

"Well, Fanny, shall we go down stairs now? Miss Stanley is all alone, and, I have no doubt, very curious to hear what we have been talking about. May I not tell her of the happiness of her favourite?"

"Not yet, dear Eva, not yet; when I am gone you may; for I know she feels a sincere interest in all that concerns me; but she would be making some ridiculous jokes now, and looking arch, and all that sort of thing, which I really could not endure. How beautifully the moon shines to-night, Eva. I am sure it never was so bright before!"

“The brightness is in your heart, dear Fanny,” said her friend, with a low sigh.  
“To me it looks less brilliant than usual—but we will go down now!”

## CHAPTER XVI.

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“ Fear not, beloved, tho' clouds may lour,  
    Whilst rainbow visions melt away,  
Faith's holy star hath still a power  
    That may the deepest midnight sway.  
Fear not ! I take a prophet's tone ;  
    Our love can neither wane nor set ;  
My heart grows strong in trust—Mine Own !  
    We shall be happy yet !”

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It was long ere Fanny, on the following morning, when she stole a few moments to visit the parsonage again, could tear herself from the caresses of the delighted and happy Mrs. Dacres (to whom she had given Edward permission to communicate their attachment.) The

old lady could not bear the idea of losing sight of a treasure so lately found. She blessed her son and future daughter at least twenty times ; asked again and again if it was all true ; and finally entreated them not to delay their union, that she might witness their happiness before she died.

At length, amid tears and blushes, Fanny made her escape, and Edward accompanied her back to the cottage. It was agreed between them that he should follow her to Elmcourt in a few weeks and demand Mrs. Aylmer's consent to their marriage. " But if," he said, at parting, " if, my Fanny, this consent is withheld, what hope have we then ?"

" Fear not," answered Fanny, " it will not be so ; and if it is, why we can wait and trust, even if it be for years. Do we not love each other ?"

\* \* \* \* \*

Fanny's journey was a rapid one ; but on

arriving at Elmcourt, she found Mrs. Aylmer in such wretched spirits, and so full of complaints at having been left alone, that she had no courage to speak of the engagement she had formed, which must eventually deprive her mother of the only society she could always command.

Mrs. Aylmer's first words to her daughter were—"Good gracious, child! how much you are improved. I declare you look quite pretty! I rejoice to see this, for it will give me something to think of. But I need not explain more now."

The explanation, however, was speedily given. Lady Mostyn had called on Mrs. Aylmer, a few days before, with Ginevra, and had boasted much of the great admiration the latter had excited during her season in London, and the probabilities there were of her making a splendid match. Mrs. Aylmer never doubted that all this was done to mortify her, and she sighed to reflect that she had now no daughter

left who could, with any chance of success, enter the lists against Ginevra Mostyn, for Fanny had always been regarded by her mother as a poor simple being, equally devoid of beauty and tact, qualifications which Mrs. Aylmer looked upon as quite indispensable for forming a good marriage. But when her daughter returned with the glow of health and happiness on her cheek, and the light of pure affection sparkling in her formerly tear-dimmed eyes, the mother's hopes revived, and she began to feel that even "poor Fanny" might become a tolerable rival to the admired and really beautiful Miss Mostyn, of Raby-hall. This restless jealousy of Lady Mostyn's daughter and desire that her own should eclipse her, had become the great passion of Mrs. Aylmer's ambitious but frivolous mind, which all the recent terrible and startling events in her family had done nothing to humble or improve. She had wept with sincerity a few weeks after Isabel's death, and for about the same time had vocifer-

ferated loudly against Clara ; but the moment a new object was presented, both her grief for the one and her anger towards the other passed away ; and Fanny soon saw with despair, that it was no time yet to speak of the young rector of Glandale.

A few days after her return home, Lady Mostyn brought Ginerva, that (as she said) the two young people might renew their acquaintance. This Fanny did with unfeigned pleasure ; but there was a reserve in Ginerva's manner, and a quiet smile on her lips when her mother spoke of the offers she had had, and the high hopes that were entertained regarding her, which rather puzzled Fanny ; and when they were gone, she said to her mother—I am so disappointed in Ginerva, mama.”

“ Disappointed ! child, why you must be mad, Fanny ; she is positively beautiful.”

“ Oh yes, but I mean in her manners, she used to seem so warm-hearted and affectionate ; and now, if you observe, she shrinks from any



advances towards familiarity, and shrouds herself in a complete atmosphere of reserve, which seems unnatural in so young a girl."

"Depend on it, Fanny, this is quite correct; nothing is more vulgar and missish than to make sudden friendships with every one of your own age that you happen to meet. Ginevra Mostyn has always had the manners of a woman of the world, and you will do well to copy them."

Fanny said no more on the subject, and indeed thought very little of it either. She wrote to Edward, explaining to him the difficulties they were likely to meet with, but at the same time exhorting him not to despair, and expressing her own hopes that when her brother returned all would go well. This done, she felt much relieved, and could now listen, without any very great sinking of the heart, to her mother's daily and wearisome exhortations to cultivate her good looks, and improve her accomplishments for the next London season.

Their present life was monotonous and lonely in the extreme, the only persons who ever paid them more than a morning visit, being Mrs. Weatherspoon, and occasionally Mrs. Northcott, who would come to have a quiet chat when she had nothing better to do. But this latter lady Mrs. Aylmer never particularly welcomed, for two reasons—the first, because, as she said, the way in which Mrs. Northcott turned up her eyes on every trifling occasion, distracted her nerves; and the second, and perhaps real one, because she always made Ginerva Mostyn's beauty and accomplishments the subjects of her discourse.

One evening, when, after having spent some hours at Elmcourt, Mrs. Northcott departed, Mrs. Aylmer abruptly exclaimed to her daughter—"Fanny, that woman will drive me mad! I am sure she means to insult you by praising that Ginny Mostyn in the absurd manner she does. You must have very little spirit to sit by and smile so complacently at the homage paid to your rival."

"Indeed, mama," answered Fanny, "I have no wish in the world to be the rival of Ginevra Mostyn, and I think all that Mrs. Northcott says and feels about her is perfectly natural. Percy Northcott, you know, was once Ginny's play-fellow, and it was even thought, in later years, her lover too."

"Bah! Miss Ginny is a great deal too well taught, and has naturally too much self-respect, to dream of throwing herself away on a young midshipman without a penny."

"But his mother says he is about to become a lieutenant, through the interest and recommendation of his commanding officer—besides, Ginevra will have about ten thousand pounds herself, and they might live very comfortably on that."

"Yes, at Plymouth or Gosport, I dare say; in a first-floor lodging, with a maid of all-work, who would nurse the children too; and where Miss Ginevra—Mrs. Northcott, junior, I should say—might indulge her taste for flowers by cultivating geraniums and mignonette in little red

pots, and her passion for riding by occasional excursions on a donkey. No, no, Fanny; Ginny Mostyn is not the fool you take her to be, depend upon it!"

"I should esteem it no proof of wisdom if she were to prefer a match of mere ambition to one of affection," Fanny ventured to say.

"I think I must have told you before," answered her mother, "that nothing is in such bad taste or so indelicate as for a young lady to be always talking of love-matches, mutual affection, and all such trash as that. It is quite disgusting, and I beg you will never use the words again. Clara's was a love-match, you know!"

"Nevertheless," persisted Fanny, feeling that it would be no longer safe to delay her confessions, "nevertheless, nothing should tempt me to marry a man I did not love."

"Pray, Miss Fanny, may I presume to take the liberty of inquiring if there has been any question of your marrying at all? Has any

distinguished individual thrown himself at your feet, or are you simply anticipating the chances of such a thing; because, if the latter, I can assure you there is no need for any alarm whatever; the slight improvement I remarked in your appearance on your return from Glandale has already disappeared; your manners are quite unformed, and you are perfectly deficient in tact and style; therefore, all these things considered, your indignation at the thought of being required to marry a man of rank or fortune appears rather premature. But perhaps," continued the worldly woman, smiling sarcastically on her silent listener, "perhaps it is I that am in error; probably your charms have won some ducal heart, while you were wandering among the shades of your 'sweet Glandale;' and I may yet hail you as 'my Honourable,' or my 'Right Honourable' daughter.'"

"Mama," replied Fanny, drawing her chair closer to her mother's, and speaking very earnestly, "I had hoped that what I have to

tell you would be received with indulgence at least. You know that even from a child I have always been told not to expect to marry well—what *you* call well—and I really believed that you thought me too insignificant to trouble yourself about in that way; therefore when Edward Dacres”—how Fanny’s heart beat as she pronounced the name!—“when Edward Dacres, the young rector of Glandale, proposed to me the evening before I left, I felt no apprehension, in accepting him, that your consent would be withheld. Just let me finish, dear mama, and do not look so contemptuously at me. There is not in all the world a nobler being than Edward Dacres: he is rich in everything but money, and I have loved him since my first visit to Glandale.”

“Have you quite finished now?” said Mrs. Aylmer, as Fanny paused for her mother to speak.

“Yes, mama,” was the low answer; and “mama” went on:—

“Then be kind enough to attend to me for a few seconds; I would not detain you longer from your delightful thoughts of your ‘noble Edward.’ That you were a fool, Fanny, I have long known, but that you were cunning or undutiful, I had yet to learn. Pray was it Miss Herbert, or the prudent and accomplished Miss Stanley, that counselled you to defy your mother’s authority, and engage yourself to a common country parson, the moment he condescended to ask you?”

“It was neither, mama,” answered Fanny, with more courage than she had yet displayed. “My own heart was the only counsellor I had; and you should not call me undutiful, for I had no intention of marrying without your consent.”

Mrs. Aylmer, throwing aside her mocking tone, replied—“That consent, Fanny, I tell you, once for all, you will never have; so the sooner you finish this foolish affair the better. And for mercy’s sake don’t pule and fret about

it, child. I consent to pardon, and say no more about the duplicity or indelicacy of your conduct, and in return I shall expect that you will wear a cheerful countenance, and enter with spirit into my views, for your forming a more splendid connexion than that hateful little Mostyn."

"Mama," said Fanny, firmly, though her eyes were filled with tears, "mama, let there be no further misunderstandings between us. If I do not marry Edward Dacres, I shall never marry at all."

"Bah, bah, child; every girl says this when they are first disappointed; but I never knew one yet that did not laugh at her own folly afterwards. Pray, has your brother been your confidant in this affair?"

"I have written to Stuart, and told him everything, but there has been no time for his answer to arrive."

"Well, at any rate he will have the sense to condemn such childish folly as this, but ob-



serve, Fanny, whether he does or not, my mind is quite made up ; and so we will talk no more about it. Now ring for lights, and then go on reading to me the novel I began this morning."

Fanny was very unhappy after this conversation with her mother, but she determined not to communicate it to Edward, till she had her brother's now anxiously expected letter. Mrs. Aylmer alluded no more to the subject, but still spoke of her hopes of humbling Lady Mostyn through the brilliancy of Fanny's marriage, just as she had done before their conversation. In fact, from a passion this wish had grown into a mental disease ; and after every visit the Mostyns paid her—and they were not unfrequent—it increased in strength. At length, one day—one dreadful day to Mrs. Aylmer—Mrs. Northcott came early in the morning to call at Elmcourt, and her admiration for that "sweet Ginevra" was more ardently expressed than ever. Nothing would

persuade the fretful hostess that there was any other object in this, than to mortify her. In vain Fanny had asserted that it was merely the good woman's exuberance of spirits on account of the expected return of her Percy, from a long visit he had paid to a naval friend, that made the doting mother more animated than usual—she would not be convinced; and while still smarting under this mortification, and snarling at Fanny for her pale and miserable looks, Lady Mostyn was announced.

“ I am come,” said that lady, blandly smiling when she had taken the seat placed for her “ without my little Ginny to-day. Pauline is going to school soon, and she cannot bear to be parted from her sister; dear, affectionate creatures! their attachment to each other is beautiful to witness. By the by, Ginny has had a most flattering offer of marriage from Lord H——, whom she used to meet in London. The letter came this morning, while we were at breakfast, and the sweet child handed it over to me with the coolest air in the world, saying

‘ Be kind enough dear ma’, to answer this for me ; I have such lots of things to do to-day, that I really shall not have a moment’s time :’ and then she went on with her breakfast. ‘ But *how* shall I answer it, darling?’ I asked, when I had read it through. ‘ Law, mama,’ she replied, ‘ you must surely know what to say ; we feel flattered, honoured, sorry to give pain, something of that sort, I suppose, will do.’ ‘ Then you intend to refuse decidedly?’ I said. ‘ Without a doubt, mama,’ answered Miss Ginny, not even looking up again from her coffee, and both her father and myself laughed heartily at her *nonchalance*. In speaking of it afterwards, Sir Charles, who of course knows very little of these matters, observed that he thought it a pity Ginny should be suffered to refuse so good a match ; but I said, quietly, ‘ *Tais-toi, mon ami*, our little girl knows what she is about.’ And he answered, ‘ Well, well, perhaps she knows better than we do. But in my opinion, a bird in the hand’s worth two in

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"I have long guessed, my dear sister, that your decision was engaged, and it gives me the greatest pleasure to hear that you are happy. Our beloved father has often spoken to me of Edward Burns, and the fact that he admired and appreciated the young man of Glenhead is quite sufficient to insure my very cordial approbation of your engagement. With regard to our mother, I think it likely you may meet with more opposition than you seem to anticipate. But never fear; if I can, I shall go right to her. There was a time when I might have thought my weak-minded sister might resist what she would call a love match, but alas! how wrong, we have all seen a child so blind where her father was. I think you already let the secret out, and she will be convinced you are right. The

Yours affectionately,  
John C. Burnes.

follow; but to her great surprise, Mrs. Aylmer never mentioned the subject at all. She was in a dreadful humour the whole day with everybody who came near her, but neither Lady Mostyn's nor Ginevra's name again passed her lips.

About a week after this, a note arrived from Raby-hall, with an invitation to Mrs. Aylmer and her daughter for a large evening party Lady Mostyn was about to give. Fanny read it aloud, and then her mother, taking it from her, threw it into the fire, exclaiming, "She knew perfectly well we should not go. Impertinent, low-bred woman! Write a decided refusal at once, Fanny."

\* \* \* \* \*

Between this time and Lady Mostyn's party, Fanny received a most affectionate letter from her brother, dated from Brussels, which concluded thus :—

“ I have long guessed, my dear sister, that your affections were engaged, and it gives me the sincerest pleasure to hear that you are so happy. Our beloved father has often spoken to me of Edward Dacres, and the fact that *he* admired and appreciated the young rector of Glandale is quite sufficient to insure my very cordial approbation of your engagement. With regard to our mother, I think it likely you may meet with more opposition than you seem to anticipate. But fear not ; if I can, it shall all go right at last. There was a time, when I too might have thought my noble-minded sister ought to make what the world calls a better match, but alas ! dear Fanny, we have little cause to hold our heads above our fellows now. I thank you sincerely for the sweet and soothing words that concluded your last letter. Yes, Fanny, you are right. If anything could bring a gleam of happiness to my heart again, it would be that. But at present I must not even allow myself to think of it.

“ You may expect me in England about the end of next month, for I am most anxious to become acquainted with my dearest sister’s chosen, and my own future brother.”

This letter greatly raised the hopes and spirits of the half-despairing girl, but she knew it would be perfectly useless, while her mother remained in her present excited state of jealous indignation against the Mostyns, to communicate the contents to her.

The time was fast approaching when Edward Dacres had promised to come and solicit Mrs. Aylmer’s consent to his marrying her daughter. And so Fanny felt that she could no longer conceal the real state of things from him. She wrote, therefore, as cautiously and kindly as possible ; dwelling more on her brother’s very cordial assent, than on her mother’s disapproval, and bidding him still hope and look forward to brighter days.

At length, the evening of Lady Mostyn’s party arrived. Mrs. Aylmer was in a worse

humour than ever, and found fault with everything Fanny did or said. In vain the patient but wearied girl tried every means to amuse her capricious companion. If she read aloud, her voice was hoarse and disagreeable; if she read to herself, she was selfish and lazy; if she played, the piano was out of tune, if she proposed a walk, she was thoughtless and unfeeling; and finally, when as a last resource she sat still and did nothing, she was stupid, *bête* uncompanionable, and worse than a dog or cat!

“Alas!” thought poor Fanny, as at length she laid her aching head on her pillow, “what a prospect for all my future life, if mama still refuses her consent to my marriage.” And she had little sleep that night.

The following morning, Mrs. Aylmer sent to say she should take breakfast in her dressing-room, and requested her daughter to join her there. Fanny hastened her toilette, and obeyed the summons, although it was one she would very gladly have dispensed with.



"I am exceedingly unwell and nervous," said the mother, as her daughter entered the room. "I have done nothing but dream of Ginerva Mostyn all night, fancying I saw her crowned with a ducal coronet, and surrounded by admiring crowds, while you were grown into a red-nosed, peevish old maid. There, sit down, child, pray; and do try, Fanny, to look a little cheerful. Your white, melancholy face, gives me the horrors.

"Shall I pour you out a cup of coffee, mama?" said Fanny, suppressing a sigh.

"Yes, and take your own breakfast quickly; we shall be having plenty of visitors by and by, to relate the extraordinary conquests made by Miss Ginny last night. I am looking forward to a most delightful day."

Fanny knew by experience that it would be worse than useless to make any reply to these observations, and still worse again to attempt to change the subject; so she said nothing at

all, but waited with patience till her mother's ill-humour should exhaust itself.

In the midst of a violent tirade uttered by Mrs. Aylmer against the mothers of beautiful daughters in general, and Lady Mostyn in particular, a loud rat, tat, tat! was heard at the hall door.

"There, did I not say so?" pushing her plate of chicken angrily away. "They cannot even wait till a decent time of day, but must come to worry and insult me before I have even breakfasted. If it is that odious old hypocrite, Mrs. Northcott, as Heaven is my witness! I will not see her."

"I think it more likely to be Mrs. Weatherspoon," replied Fanny, "and you know, mama, she never praises Ginerva Mostyn."

A servant entered to say that Mrs. William Weatherspoon was below, and wished particularly to see either Mrs. Aylmer or her daughter.

"Let her come up," said the lady of the house, in no very gracious tones.

"And bring another cup and plate," added Fanny to the attendant. "I dare say she will be glad of something after her long walk."

"How do, how do, my dears?" exclaimed the early visiter, entering the room with an air of unusual animation, and throwing herself panting into the nearest chair. "I'm monstrous tired, I can tell you: but if I'm the first with the news, I shan't care."

"What news, what news?" cried Mrs. Aylmer. "Were *you* at the party last night? Of course it's something about that."

"Pray take a cup of coffee, Mrs. Weather-spoon," said Fanny, wishing to delay as long as possible a communication that she doubted not would increase her mother's irritation.

"Thank you, my dear, I will; and a *leetle* bit of that beautiful white chicken. That will do, Miss Fanny; and now the smallest bit of tongue. There, thank you—quite enough. I beg your pardon, Mrs. Aylmer, you were inquiring about the party. I *was* there; Mr.

Weatherspoon and myself get invitations to all the grand folks' houses in the neighbourhood, but then my William, you know, is of a very ancient Scottish family; a Highlander on his mother's side; though I am sure till I was married I never knew that a Highlander was a bit better than a Lowlander. But, la! my dear, there's as much difference, it seems, between them, as between a king and a beggar. They are all—the Highlanders, I mean—descended from Lord this, and the Duke of that; and my William—let me see, I think I can give you his whole genealogy. I am sure I ought to remember it, for I've heard it times enough."

"Do not trouble yourself to repeat it now, I beg," said Mrs. Aylmer, in great indignation. "but oblige me by recollecting the important news you came to relate."

"Well, my dear lady, I shall come to that presently; but I was telling you about this grand party. There were hundreds and hun-

dreds of people there. It was a wonder to me where they all came from. The young people danced, and those of maturer age played cards. I do love a quiet game of cards above everything, and I'm not ashamed to confess it. Weatherspoon played too; he was my partner, and we won nine shillings a-piece. Think of that, my dear, for one night's work! But the beauty of it all is, that my husband got so tipsy afterwards down stairs, on some Highland whisky that Sir Charles brought home from his last grouse-shooting expedition, that he forgot all about our winnings, and has never asked me for a penny of it, so there are my eighteen shillings to spend as I like. The worst of poor Weatherspoon is his terrible stinginess. Now there was dear, blessed Nathan, my first husband—truly I may say my heart is buried in his grave; that *was* a man, my dear—so handsome too; and as for family and descent, why

he came in a direct line from Josephus, the great Jewish warrior and historian."

"What do I care," cried Mrs. Aylmer, completely losing the little temper she had at first possessed, "if he came from Barabbas? Have you or have you not anything to tell?"

"You shall judge of that presently, my dear, if you will but have a *little* patience. The next thing I must come to is the supper. Such a turn-out! 'A pretty penny this must have cost Sir Charles,' I whispered to Weather-  
spoon as he went into the room. A young dandy who was just before us, overheard my observation, and good gracious, my dear, it was worth something to have seen the look he gave me as he turned round; he measured me with his impudent eye from head to foot, and then I heard him say to the lady who was hanging on his arm, 'How did that person get here?' However, this did not take away my appetite, I assure you my dear; I enjoyed my supper

monstrously; and so did Weatherspoon—although he doesn't like champagne, at least he prefers—”

“ Good heavens,” again interrupted Mrs. Aylmer, now fairly out of patience, “ who in all the world cares what an old idiot of a pro-sing Scotchman likes or dislikes? Really, Mrs. Weatherspoon, I have no leisure to attend to such nonsense as this.”

“ Well, well, my good lady, don't be angry, it's just coming now. After supper, we went up stairs, and a country dance was proposed. ‘ Miss Mostyn must open it,’ said several voices at once, and Miss Mostyn was immediately sought for. It reminded me for all the world of the story of a bride who was missing about a hundred years ago, and her name was Ginevra too. It's all in poetry, my dear, and—”

“ ‘Go on, go on, if you do not intend to drive me mad!’ ” screamed Mrs. Aylmer, in a towering rage.

“ Lord, my dear, how you do flurry one. I

am going on as fast as I can. I tell you all the rooms were searched through and through for Miss Ginny, but no Miss Ginny appeared. You may fancy the confusion we were in. Lady Mostyn looked as pale as death, and Sir Charles as red as a turkey-cock. The servants all declared they knew nothing about it, and the next question was, is either of the male guests missing too? Then up walks your favourite, Mrs. Northcott, and declares that she has not seen her son since supper. 'What! what!' screamed Lady Mostyn, 'do you mean to assert that there is the smallest chance that my Ginevra, my beautiful and accomplished daughter, has eloped with your son?' 'If it should be so, madam,' replied Mrs. Northcott, with admirable command of temper, 'I can only say that I shall regret it quite as much as your ladyship.' Then followed such a scene between the two mothers!

"Well, well, I can fancy all that," exclaimed the impatient Mrs. Aykmer. "Tell me,



I implore you, the end of the affair. *Has* Ginevra Mostyn eloped with Percy Northcott?"

"Lord bless you! yes; there's no doubt about that; but the best of it is, Sir Charles obstinately refused to go after them, though his wife cried and wrung her hands, and said she should die if he did not. 'Nonsense, my dear,' he replied, 'you ought to be thankful it's no worse. Let her marry Master Percy and be hanged!' Then he apologized for wishing us all good night. We took the hint, and went away; while Lady Mostyn was carried to her room in violent hysterics. And this, my dear, is all I know of the matter."

"And you are quite, quite sure, my dearest Mrs. Weatherspoon," said the now courteous Mrs. Aylmer, "that what you have told me is true?"

"Ay, true enough. I knew you would be pleased to hear it. That's why I got up so

early this morning, and came away without a mouthful of breakfast to tell it to you."

"Well, my kind friend, you shall not be a loser by it. Do me the favour of accepting this bracelet," said Mrs. Aylmer, unclasping a very splendid one from her arm. "You can stay and dine with us to-day. Fanny, my sweet love, you look pale. By the by, what does your brother say in his last letter about that little affair you mentioned to me?"

"He gives his very cordial assent, mama," replied Fanny, with a beating heart.

"Well, well, my love, I still think it a vastly foolish matter; but as your brother, who now stands almost in a father's place to you, approves, why I shall say no more against it; so you may go now, my dear, and write to your friends at Glandale. I shall be happy to see both the mother and son as soon as they like to come."

"Mama! dearest mama! how *good* you are!" murmured Fanny, as she threw her arms

round her mother's neck, and then hastily retired.

She wrote to Edward first, and then to Mrs. Dacres, and then to Eva—and how nimbly her pen ran over the paper! as to each of them she expressed the happiness of her innocent and loving heart. And the letters were despatched that day. This was fortunate, for by the next, Mrs. Aylmer's triumphant rejoicing at the misfortune of Lady Mostyn, and her good humour resulting therefrom, had in some degree cooled; and it is possible that had the letters not been despatched, she would, even yet, have retracted the consent to her daughter's marriage, given in a moment of vindictive enthusiasm. As it was, she could only show her dislike to it, by railing against the indelicacy of girls being in such a hurry to get married; and prophesying that Fanny would be sick of her husband in a week. All this, and much more, Fanny bore with the most exemplary patience, feeling fully rewarded

when, in due time after, a carriage stopped at the door, and from it descended Eva Herbert, Miss Stanley, and Edward Davies!

After the presentation of the latter to his mother-in-law, the cause of the visitors coming together was explained. When Fanny had time written to tell Edward that there was likely to be a long absence during their marriage, he had immediately communicated this to his mother. Now the old lady, first approaching her daughter-in-law, had set her heart upon seeing her son and his wife settled in the parsonage before she died; and on hearing that this wish was likely to be disappointed, had given way to such violent grief that a severe illness had been the consequence; and even when the second visitors arrived, inviting herself and Edward to Elmsworth, she still thought it was all done to deceive her, and obstinately refused to be comforted. "Let me see you married, let me press my darling Fanny to my heart, once more in this place," she constantly

said, "and then I shall be happy, and can die in peace." Her feebleness was too great to allow of her travelling, so at last Miss Stanley and Eva, who had intended to visit Elmcourt about this time, agreed to accompany Edward, and join their entreaties to his, that the marriage might take place immediately.

Mrs. Aylmer listened to this explanation in some displeasure, and urged a thousand objections to such indecent haste; but the three pleaders overruled them all. Fanny herself, amid happy tears, timidly suggested that they ought at least to wait for Stuart's return; but Edward whispered, "You will probably have your brother during your whole life, dearest; my mother will be but a short time with us." And Fanny said no more.

Eva had decided at last to go abroad, for her health was still very delicate. Miss Stanley was to accompany her, and she asked Mrs. Aylmer to be also of the party. This the latter refused, as she said her son would probably

arrive in England about the time they started; but the attention pleased her, and she entered with some interest into the preparations for her daughter's wedding, though, from their being in mourning, she could not have it on so splendid a scale as she would have wished. All was soon completed, and on a morning glowing with the brightest sunshine, Fanny Aylmer, with Miss Stanley and Eva for her bridesmaids, and Dr. Northcott to give her away, pledged her faith to Edward Dacres; and immediately after, started for the home she so long had sighed for—the sweet parsonage of Glandale.

## CHAPTER XVII.

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“——She hath ta'en farewell ;  
Upon her hearth the fire is dead,  
The smoke in air hath vanished ;  
The last long lingering look is given,  
The shuddering start ! the inward groan—  
And the pilgrim on her way is gone !”

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EvA did not linger long at Elmcourt after Fanny's marriage, though Mrs. Aylmer would fain have had her stay till Stuart's return ; first, because she hated the idea of being again left alone ; and secondly, because she began to think, that after all her son could not do better than marry the possessor of two hundred thousand pounds. Eva, however, whatever

her secret inclinations were, would not be persuaded to defer her departure ; and so, about the middle of October, she set out on her journey, accompanied by the delighted Miss Stanley (who had never been from England before), old Janet, and two or three other attendants befitting her fortune and position.

The novelty of travelling in some degree diverted her mind, and by the time they arrived at Paris, Miss Stanley had predicted for her young friend, a perfect and speedy restoration to health. While here, Eva received a long letter from Fanny, and this gave her more pleasure than anything else had done since she left England ; for the writer described her own happiness in such glowing and animated terms, and spoke of the joy her presence gave to Edward's mother, and dwelt with such rapture and gratitude on all the blessings that surrounded her, that Eva felt ; as she read, it must be sinful to despair while such happiness as this existed in the world.



In a postscript, Fanny said, "I hope, when you are in Italy, you will find time to pay poor dear Alice a visit. If her reason has at all returned—and it was believed by the physicians that as her health declined, it would do so—she would be so happy in having a friend of her own sex and country near her."

The very next day after the receipt of this letter, Eva gave directions for leaving Paris.

"Surely," said the disappointed Miss Stanley "there can be no necessity for all this haste; we have scarcely seen anything of Paris yet, and I was just beginning to get the Parisian accent."

"Well, well, you can get it when we come back," answered Eva, with some impatience. "I will not stay an hour longer now; you know I hate sight-seeing above all things in the world; besides, I am delighted to have an object in view—I felt no interest in my journey before. Yes, we will go to Naples at once—that I am

quite determined on." And to Naples they went.

Eva was right in saying that she wanted an object, for the moment one was given her, her spirits and her health rapidly improved, and Miss Stanley, when she saw this, could no longer regret that they had left the gay capital, although the accent was but half acquired, and the sights but half seen.

On arriving at Naples, Eva would only rest for an hour, and then she insisted on going to the Villa Solari. "You need not come," she said to her companion, "if you are fatigued." And this permission to stay at home being gladly accepted by the tired Miss Stanley, the young heiress proceeded alone to the abode of Alice Norton.

The lazy-looking Italian porter at the gate cast his eye languidly over the handsome English carriage, and then, in answer to Eva's inquiries, replied, with the usual indifference of his countrymen, that he knew nothing about

the health of the Signora, or whether she could receive strangers or not, but that the lady might follow him. Eva immediately descended from her carriage, and the old man led the way through a quadrangle till they came to another door, elaborately carved and ornamented. Here a bell was pulled, which a stately Major-domo speedily answered. On his appearance, the ancient and somewhat surly porter, muttering something to the man, waddled back to finish the nap that Eva's arrival had disturbed, leaving the Signora to the guidance of the new-comer, who conducted her through several passages to a splendidly-furnished saloon, commanding a distant view of the Bay of Naples. Eva gave her name to the servant; and then she was left alone.

"How beautiful all this is!" she said to herself, gazing first on the outward view softened by an Italian evening sun, and then on the chaste and elegant decorations of the room itself. The exquisite and life-like paintings of Raphael

and Claude Lorraine that adorned the walls, the Etruscan vases, filled with the choicest flowers, the rare Indian screens, and all those minor, fanciful ornaments, that tell of female rule and female taste—"how beautiful indeed it is; and yet, poor Alice! its loveliness can be nothing to you." And there stood her harp, with its cover on; and Eva thought how long it probably had stood thus, and how much longer yet it might stand, before its sweet but now broken chords would be struck by Alice again. And "poor poor, Alice!" once more she was repeating, when her meditations were suddenly put a stop to, by the entrance of an elegant-looking woman, somewhat past middle age, but who evidently perfectly understood the art of concealing time's ravages, and thought it no sin to avail herself of the knowledge. This, Eva concluded, must be Madame de Rozel, and she was not long left in doubt, for speaking half in French, and half in English, the lady thus addressed her.

"*Ah, mademoiselle*, you are *sans doute* some friend of Miss Norton. *Moi je suis son amie aussi*, and she beg me——"

"What!" interrupted Eva, "is Miss Norton then recovered?"

"*Ah, la pauvre petite!* she vary ill *mais* quite senseable now—*depuis quinze jours!*"

"Then I can see her?" asked Eva, rising.

"*Bientôt, bientôt, mademoiselle*, but the great excitement bad, the doctere say. She almost die when *le cousin* come."

"*Le cousin?* Do you speak of Mr Aylmer?" said Eva, resuming her seat again.

"*Oui sans doute, mademoiselle*. Oh, he is good *n'est-ce pas?* *Vous êtes sa sœur peut-être?*"

"No, but is Mr. Aylmer still in Naples?"

"Oh, yez, he with *sa cousine* now; he come every day; she vary happie when she hear his step—*mais qu'avez vous donc, mademoiselle?* you are pale, *comme la mort.*"

"It is nothing, thank you," said Eva, once

more rising. "I have been in bad health lately, and am only just arrived from a long journey. Perhaps I had better call to-morrow to see Miss Norton. You can tell her it was Miss Herbert."

"*Mais, attendez vous un peu,*" exclaimed the kind-hearted Frenchwoman. "I am sure if you come from England, *cette chère petite* will be so happy to see you; " and without awaiting a remonstrance, she opened the door and was gone.

Well, it was something to be alone at such a moment, to be able to think over what she had heard, and endeavour, amid the distracting thoughts that haunted her, to decide what was best to be done in the dilemma in which she found herself. So Eva felt, but she could not subdue the sensations of shame and deep annoyance that arose in her mind, while reflecting on what Stuart would think of her being here. "Nay, what *can* he think?" she exclaimed passionately, "but that it was to seek him I

came? How can I ever convince him," she continued, musing, "that I believed he was in England? And he will *pity* me while he tells of his devotion to Alice, who but a few minutes ago, I was pitying! Ah me! how gladly would I purchase her present blessedness by all the sufferings she has undergone! How truly I can still say—I would I were that pale-faced cousin. But how shall I meet him? he must so despise me, when he remembers my engagement to Sir Felix. Oh, that that part of my life could be for ever blotted out! But all is misery for me, whether I look into the past or the future. And Stuart is near me now—a few doors, perhaps, only divide us."

At this thought Eva's heart throbbed so wildly that she pressed her hand closely against it, and a sudden faintness came over her. At the same moment a rapid step sounded in the passage, the door opened, and Stuart Aylmer entered!

How little, how very little, can pride or

dignity, or any other feeling, avail to check the expression of the joyous and overwhelming emotion, that rushes over the heart on the sudden appearance of a beloved object! Eva became alarmingly convinced of this, as Stuart eagerly advanced to where she stood. Her colour went and came; she trembled violently, and tears, in spite of all her efforts, started to her eyes.

“Miss Herbert, this is a surprise,” he had begun to say, when she interrupted him.

“And to me I assure you it is even a greater one to find you here. I thought you had been some weeks in England.”

How very cold her words sounded when contrasted with the agitation she had displayed. Stuart was struck by their tone, and replied, with less animation than he had at first exhibited—

“I did expect myself to have been in England ere this, but business connected with my late uncle’s affairs obliged me to go to Rome,



and when there, I thought I might as well pay one more hasty visit to Naples. I found Alice in such an alarming state, that I could not leave till she was better. The crisis is past, and her reason, but not her health; has returned. For even this, however, we must be very thankful; she has no relative, I might almost say no friend but myself in this place, and of course my society is some consolation to her in her delicate and declining state. It was very kind of you, Miss Herbert, to think of coming to see her."

Eva fancied there was some embarrassment in Stuart's manner while speaking of his cousin, and she replied—"Nay, do not give me credit for anything of the sort. Fanny wrote to me while I was in Paris, begging me to visit Alice, and I was really glad of having something to do, and so I came here directly. However," she continued, seeing Stuart looked pained and surprised by the apparent indifference of her words, "however, I shall be delighted indeed

if I can be of the least service to your cousin ; I have nothing in the world to do, as I said before, and my companion, Miss Stanley, is an inveterate sight-seeker, an employment I detest ; therefore, if Alice will let me come and sit with her every day, I assure you I shall consider the obligation to be wholly on my side. But may I not see her now ?”

“ Yes,” replied Stuart, in a tone of disappointment that Eva could not account for. “ I dare say Madame de Rozel has prepared her by this time to receive you ; we are obliged to use the utmost caution, as the smallest degree of agitation affects her so greatly.”

He rang the bell as he spoke, and on its being answered, desired the servant to beg Madame de Rozel to come to him. In a few minutes more this lady appeared, and telling Eva that Alice was quite prepared to receive her, led the way along several passages and corridors, till they came to a saloon filled with delicate plants, whose rare fragrance perfumed

the air on all sides. At one end of this room there was a low door, which Stuart told Eva led to Alice's apartments, and at which the Frenchwoman softly entered, motioning to her companions to follow. They did so, but the careful obscurity of the invalid's chamber was so nearly allied to darkness, that it was only when Alice spoke, that Eva was conscious of her presence.

"How very, very kind of you, Miss Herbert," she said, "to come to me. Stuart will thank you better than I can do."

Eva was so struck by the hollow feebleness of the voice, that she had no power to reply. She turned to Stuart, and he led her silently to where Alice lay; and now, her eyes having become accustomed to the subdued light, she was able to see the fearful change that grief and illness had wrought in that once delicately rounded face. The invalid was reclined on a sofa, with one arm thrown listlessly over the cushion at her head. Her beautiful hair was

all bound together behind in a simple knot, leaving nothing to soften or conceal the attenuation of her pale, thin cheeks; but in spite of this, she looked lovely still; for the slightly aquiline profile, the small, well-shaped mouth, were as perfect as ever. and between the slightly-parted lips the white teeth looked pearly and beautiful. And then her eyes—what could be more glorious and full of soul than these! Eva looked and looked again, and each time she thought she had never beheld anything so wondrously beautiful as the eyes of Alice Norton now appeared. The thinness of her face increased their apparent size, and then that passion which even madness had not quenched, gave to them so deep and soft a light, that they became almost dazzling in their strange beauty.

“You are surprised to find me so changed?” said Alice, observing Eva looking earnestly at her.

“I am surprised to find, dear Alice, that

after all your illness, you should have grown more lovely than ever," answered the other, sitting down beside the couch of the invalid.

"Lovely?" said Alice, and she glanced involuntarily to where Stuart stood. *His* eyes were bent upon Eva, and quickly withdrawing her own, Alice began to talk in a rapid and excited manner, till her companions all thought she was acting unwisely; and Madame de Rozel declared it was time for both the visitors to go away. Eva instantly rose, and taking an affectionate leave of Alice, promised to come again on the following day. Stuart then advanced to his cousin, and Eva could not resist the temptation of watching their adieux to each other. But Stuart only took the thin hand that was extended to him, and murmured, "God bless you, Alice!" while he pressed it gently; and Alice only fixed her mournful eyes for a moment upon him, and spoke no word.

Neither did Eva speak again till Stuart had placed her in the carriage; and then, in answer

to his offers of service in reference to her little suite, she replied, that she left all arrangements of every sort and kind to Miss Stanley, who she doubted not would be happy to renew her acquaintance with him.

Miss Stanley, on Eva's return, listened with much interest to the recital of her meeting with the cousins, and begged for permission to accompany her to the Villa Solari, on the following morning, which was of course instantly granted, although Eva would much rather that the sharp and penetrating eyes of her former instructress had been hunting out the curiosities of Naples than bent (as she knew they would be) curiously upon her during her meeting with Stuart Aylmer.

They found Alice more cheerful than on the preceding day, and very anxious to hear the particulars of her cousin Fanny's marriage, which Stuart had slightly mentioned to her before. Miss Stanley gave a very animated account of it, courtship and all; and the invalid seemed to

listen with great interest ; but this was before Stuart arrived. When his step was heard, Eva, who was sitting close to Alice's couch, noticed that her breathing became heavier, the expression of her eyes more full of life, and the pale and hectic changing on her cheek nearly as fast as the beatings of her heart. " There can be no doubt that this is love," thought the silent watcher. " If *he* betrays himself so soon, I shall have nothing more to hope or fear."

But Stuart, if he had anything to betray, was certainly more guarded than poor Alice, for Eva discovered nothing further during this visit regarding his sentiments towards his invalid cousin, than on the preceding one.

And the next and the next again, it was all the same. Miss Stanley, seeing she was of no use whatever there, and having taken a sort of dislike to the good natured but talkative French woman, soon grew excessively tired of these daily visits to the sick room. She discovered that the smell of the flowers from the adjoining

saloon, and the heated temperature of Alice's apartment, were very injurious to her health; and that an airing in the carriage round the beautiful environs of the city, suited her constitution infinitely better. And Eva gladly suffered her to have her own way, for she was conscious of feelings and jealousies that she shrank from having observed, or even guessed at, by another.

Yes, this daily and constant intercourse, so increased her passion for Stuart, that if he but brought a flower for Alice, and neglected to give her one at the same time, she felt a sickening sensation at her heart, and wished once more to be "that palefaced cousin."

But day by day, the little strength the long-suffering Alice had possessed, declined; her pale cheeks became thinner, and her blue eyes brighter and more pure, till all who looked on her felt convinced that the last struggle was coming on. No murmur ever passed her lips; she said she knew that she was dying, and that



she *hoped* she was resigned; but sometimes as she spoke, a large tear would steal from beneath her drooping eyelid, gently telling that earth was still too dear.

One evening, when Eva was saying good by, Alice whispered to her—"Come early to-morrow—I wish so much to speak to you alone."

It will not be doubted that this request was readily complied with. At least an before her usual time of arriving at the villa, Eva entered the room of Alice Norton. Madame de Rozel was attending on her charge, but she went out directly Miss Herbert came in, begging the latter not to allow "*la chère petite*" to talk too much, as the physician had been there, and said she was much weaker than usual. Eva promised, and then she was left alone with Alice, who was the first to speak.

"Eva," she said, "I have very little strength remaining, so I must not employ it unnecessarily. Answer me one question, and re-

member that she who asks it, will, in a few days, perhaps hours, have put away for ever all earthly feelings—Do you love Stuart Aylmer?"

Eva was startled, and for one brief moment disposed to resent the question; but Alice laid her hand on her companion's arm as she again said, "Dearest Eva, you must tell me; and to make it easier let me declare to you first, that he worships you with his whole heart and soul, and—"

"Alice, Alice, how do you know this?—you do not know it," interrupted Eva, with excitement; "yet say it once more, dear, dear Alice—you would not deceive me?"

"No, Eva—and now my question is answered by your emotion, I will reply to yours. This is how I know that Stuart loves you, and you will feel it is the best and surest way. *I love him myself!* and love is so watchful, Eva. Oh!" she continued, clasping her thin hands, while the deep hectic came rapidly to

her cheek, "oh! that I should live to confess my heart's secret. But I am dying, and this haunting passion must be conquered ere my soul can turn entirely to Heaven. I must see you and Stuart plighted to each other; I must see you both happy in your mutual love, and then, perhaps then—" and she closed her eyes, and leaned back for a few seconds—"and then Eva," continued Alice, again starting up, "it would be over, and I should die! Ah, death would have no terrors if I could wean my heart from him. Eva, dear Eva, pray for me; I am weak, and I have never struggled against this love. If I could but resolve not to see him again—but no, for your sake and for his this would not do (was there no sophistry in this reasoning?) I must see you both happy," continued the pale girl; "happy in acknowledged love——"

"Alice," said Eva, in real alarm, "I beseech you do not betray to Stuart what I have

so incautiously revealed to you. If he really loves me——”

“Hush, hush,” interrupted Alice, “I hear his step; do not speak, Eva; it may be the last time I shall ever hear it.” She closed her eyes as she spoke, and a deep flush passed over her features; but a smile, beautiful as a seraph’s, beamed on her lips, as Stuart entered the room. Eva was weeping, and could not speak, so Alice welcomed him, and then she continued—

“They say I am worse to-day, Stuart, and that I must not talk, so, if you please, you shall read to us; and do open the blinds a little, I am growing weary of this darkness.”

Stuart obeyed both these requests; but though he had chosen a very interesting book, he soon discovered that his listeners were inattentive. He ceased reading, therefore, and said—

“Perhaps I weary you, dear Alice. You appear to be suffering?”

“Yes—no,” replied his cousin, starting as if from a reverie. “Go on, Stuart; I do not suffer much.”

Stuart did go on, but in a few minutes more he perceived that Alice’s eyes had gradually closed, and that she was now asleep. Eva, who also observed this, said—“She will be the better for rest, for I know she passed a very bad night.” And then she went up to Alice’s couch, and arranged the pillows more comfortably for her. While doing this, a book fell from beneath them, which Stuart picked up, and they found it was a Bible, with the words “Nina’s most precious bequest to her dear Alice,” written on the blank page. They silently replaced it, and then both stood and gazed on the marble features of the sleeping girl.

“How beautiful she is!” said Eva, at length; and even her low, soft voice sounded strange in the deep stillness of the room. Stuart turned to look at his companion, and when she saw

his eyes fixed intently upon her, a deep blush overspread her features, while Alice's words rushed to her mind. Immediately after, she walked to a bookcase at the further end of the room, and scarcely conscious of what she did, began taking down several books at once. In another moment Stuart was by her side.

"Are you searching for any particular work, Miss Herbert?" he said, and his accents were so full of mournfulness, that Eva turned, towards him in surprise.

"You think your cousin is worse to-day?" she asked, in a low voice.

"She does appear weaker than usual, but she may linger long in this state," he replied.

Eva once more began pulling the books out of their places, and once more Stuart offered to assist her.

"There is a volume of your favourite Shelley," he said; "shall I reach that for you?"

"Yes," answered Eva, and as she took it,

her hand trembled so violently that Stuart ventured to retain it for a moment in his own ; but his agitation was almost as great as hers, as he said—

“ I have never yet thanked you, as Alice bade me, for all your kindness to her, Miss Herbert ; may I not do so now ? ”

“ Oh, I have done so little for her,” faltered Eva, scarcely knowing what she said, for Stuart still held her hand. And he continued—  
“ Dearest Miss Herbert, a sister could not have been kinder or more attentive ; and I am sure she feels it deeply.”

Eva now began to think that he had no right to retain her hand, if he was only going to talk about her goodness to his cousin ; and so she attempted to withdraw it, but it was so gently that he felt emboldened to keep it still ; while he said—

“ Do not go away. This may seem a strange time and a strange place for the words that I would speak to you, but I may not have an

opportunity again. I have delayed them, too, from very cowardice, for Eva—let me for once call you dearest Eva—the happiness of all my future life depends on your reception of them. You know how very long I have loved you, worshipped you, how this love has withstood time, absence, and, more than all, that your preference for another——”

“For another! oh, Stuart!” interrupted Eva, raising her beaming eyes to her lover’s face. “I never, never loved another!”

Then followed words of passionate and devoted love, and confessions, and explanations which can be interesting to none but lovers themselves—and to them how interesting! For nearly an hour these long-divided but now entirely united hearts revelled in their new-born happiness, sitting and gazing fondly at each other, and forgetting all the world besides. After all, love is a very selfish passion! Even Alice was unthought of then, for the whole earth and everything around seemed changed.



"Surely it is a dream," murmured Eva at length, "and we shall awake to something less full of happiness than this."

"There never was a dream so blissful, my own beloved," whispered Stuart, as he pressed her little hand once more passionately to his lips.

At this moment they both turned to look towards the part of the room where Alice lay asleep. The blinds were still unclosed, and the light shone full upon her couch. Her eyes, those large, mournful, speaking eyes, were open now, and fixed steadfastly on the lovers. There was no trace of tears on her face, but it seemed as if the effort to check them had brought the deep and unnatural hectic that burned there. It was not grief, or anguish, or despair that her look betrayed, but a something calmer, holier, that the struggling with all these had left. It was a look that Stuart and Eva both felt could never be forgotten; but the latter understood it best; and a deep feeling of self-reproach came over her as she hastened to Alice's side.

"Have you been long awake?" she said with some confusion.

"I scarcely know how long," replied Alice, very gently and kindly, and then she asked Stuart to go and look for Madame de Rosel.

The moment he had closed the door, she took Eva's hand, and pressing it fervently said, "Heaven grant that you and Stuart may be always as happy as you have been during the last few minutes. I see Eva," she continued, "that you are reproaching yourself for having allowed me to be a witness to what you suppose has given me pain ; but you will do so no longer, when I tell you that my struggle is over. Yes, Heaven be praised for this, there is nothing now between my soul and God. I have seen his entire devotion to you, his entire forgetfulness of me, and I must not deny that the first feeling was one of unmixed anguish ; but oh ! it was necessary, Eva, for my heart was so completely bound up in him. Indeed, indeed, it is all over now. I prayed, and my prayer

was heard. Never, dearest Eva, let a thought of me in after years cloud for one instant your happiness. Believe me, when I declare to you my firm conviction, that if I could recover and be well again, even then, this passion of my life would be only as a dream to me. But I am happy, very happy, [at the thought of dying now, of going to rest, Eva. Those who have their portion in this world, those whose hopes are realized, and whose hearts are filled, have much stronger temptations than such as I. Oh, Eva, yours will be a blessed lot; but take care that your soul becomes not too fondly entwined with an earthly love. I feel now that mine would have been, had my lot been yours, and therefore it is far, far better, that I should die. Do not weep, dear Eva; there should not be a single cloud over your happiness now. I hear them coming, and you must smile again, as I do.”

When Madame de Rozel entered, she was struck by the excitement of Alice's look, and

mistook the hectic on her cheeks for the bloom of health.

"Ah, *la chère petite*," she said, "*qu'elle a bonne mine à présent!*" and then she turned to Eva, and continued, "*Mademoiselle Herbert, je vous en fais mes compliments* ; it is you who make *la petite* well."

Alice tried to be cheerful to atone for the silence of the other two, but the effort, she soon found, was beyond her strength, and so she told them she was fatigued ; and Madame de Rozel immediately advised them to go.

"God bless you both," exclaimed Alice, with much fervour and solemnity, as they parted. One tear rolled down her face when their footsteps had quite died away, but this was the last dedicated to any earthly feeling.

And the afternoon and the evening wore away, and Alice still lay silent and motionless on her couch. The good Frenchwoman, believing her to be really better, and only a little

fatigued from talking, did not scruple to comply with the young girl's request that she might be left alone. Margaret brought in the sick-room dinner, and took it away again almost untasted; but this was far from an uncommon thing, and excited no surprise or alarm.

And night came on, and the full bright moon arose, and shone into the silent room. Alice looked upon it, and upon the outward scene it lightened, the gardens still so beautiful, and the orange groves, and the distant hills; all unchanged since with Nina Solari she had gazed on their loveliness, and wondered how their possessor could view them with so much indifference. And then her mind wandered farther back, and her mother's death-bed rose again before her; the sufferer's pale, sad face, and her dying charge. And the vision of the meek and patient Maurice came; and all the ionate wo of the weary time she had passed in England was present to Alice now. And

then, as some confused but blissful dream came back, the strangely happy period when she had looked forward to Stuart's coming to her, and telling of his love; and after that, *the fearful blank!* And as Alice Norton thought on all these things, she felt from her very inmost soul that it was best for her to die, and the lonely girl clasped her thin hands, and fervently thanked God that He was calling her to eternal rest.

At length, old Margaret came in, bringing lights with her; but Alice made her extinguish them, that she might still look upon the bright moon, and the pale stars that were now coming out one by one in the deep, pure sky.

"And Margaret," she said, "you may stay with me if you like; dear Margaret, do not be unhappy when I tell you I feel myself dying. I have seen death often—I have watched all who loved me die! and it has no terrors for me. Ah, you are weeping, my poor Margaret; you think it is a sad thing for one so young to leave

the world; and it is true that the world is very lovely; but Heaven, dear Margaret, is lovelier still. Remember how little joy I have ever had; how little I should have, if I were now to recover. I have few friends, and those I do possess have each some one far dearer to them than I am; dear Margaret, you know I am a lonely being here, and that in Heaven I shall be united to those who loved me. I can look now on the pure stars, and fancy them the dwelling-places of those who have gone before me to their rest. Oh, Margaret, if you knew how my soul is yearning, panting for that rest, you would not weep as you are doing, for you love me, and would rejoice in my happiness. Come now, and let me lean in your arms, and look while I can on that glorious sky."

And the old woman supported the young girl, and the moonlight shone in upon them both, revealing the tearful, wrinkled face of the one, and the calm and holy beauty of the other. And Alice, exhausted now by all the excitement

of the day, continued for some time silent, with her eyes meekly raised in prayer.

At length, Margaret felt her start. "My darling," she sobbed, "are you suffering? Oh, what can I do for you?"

"Pray! dearest Margaret, pray with me," said the dying girl, in a scarcely articulate whisper; "for the moon and the stars are fading. Now my mother, Maurice, Nina, I am coming, and I am happy—happy!"

Her head fell softly on Margaret's shoulder, and so gently had her soul been summoned, that it was only some time after, when the old woman felt the icy touch of the cold cheek, that she became aware that Alice Norton was dead!



## CHAPTER XVIII.

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" Good night—all's well !"

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SEVEN summers have passed since the year in which Eva Herbert became the wife of Stuart Aylmer; and the anxious excitements and strugglings of the social world which has been presented to the reader, have, for the better part, given place to that peace of heart which passes the understanding of those who seek it not.

Soon after his marriage, Stuart, possessed of a splendid fortune in his own right and that of Eva, made arrangements for investing a large sum of money in the purchase of an estate ;

and Eva having expressed an ardent wish to live in Westmoreland, within as easy access as possible to Fanny and Glandale, the rich man's wishes were obtained ; and Stuart — through his well-paid and active agents, assisted by Edward Dacres, who was, on his part, equally urged on by Fanny to further the means of a neighbourhood so wished for by her—succeeded in obtaining a fine large estate, picturesque with Westmoreland beauty, and nearly as rich in dark woods, sweet lakes, green valleys, and blue-peaked hills, as the neighbourhood of Glandale itself, which is only five or six miles distant from Larch-hall; the name of Eva's home.

But Stuart still was young ; and though the sweetest part of his time was that spent in the beautiful solitudes of his Westmoreland domain, with a being by his side whom he worshipped as the good angel that cast the bright gladness of peace and love upon his every path ; still he found that his position and wealth re-

quired him to take upon himself other duties and employments than those of attending to his estate, improving the beauty of the park landscapes, constructing flower-gardens for Eva, training splendid horses to gentleness for her riding, and reading their favourite authors together during the evening.

He was now a man of some twelve thousand a year; was not without considerable talent, and some ambition to distinguish himself—if but for the benefit of the beautiful boy, with Eva's own dark eyes, his first-born and best beloved. So he entered parliament; had a town house—yet not exactly in London, for Eva had an unconquerable objection to its streets and squares, but in a beautiful part of a fashionable suburb; and with her gardens, conservatory, and green lawn, she did not lose all the summer time she spent there, although she counted the days till she returned to Westmoreland.

Stuart took a place in the House of Com-

mons, which a young man of active talent, when combined with the fame of wealth, can so frequently obtain. It was felt that he represented interests; the East India Company, with whom he had important connexions, and in the funds of which he had large investments, supported him. Three years after his marriage, he was made a baronet, and at a later period refused an official appointment from the government, because it would have prevented him from enjoying his yearly six months' paradise in his Westmoreland Eden, surrounded by those he loved.

And first, the very first of those, except his own family, were the people of the parsonage of Glandale. Neither Edward Dacres nor his bright-eyed and pure-hearted little wife, ever thought of leaving that beautiful parish, although Fanny's fortune might easily have procured distinguished preferment in the church. A new wing was built to the parsonage, and it was Fanny's continued wish that

it should be as completely covered over with ivy as the older part of the building. Beautiful as the personage had seemed in its old modest days, it was now elaborated into a striking object in the scene. A row of tall Gothic windows in the new wing, running along a bright green bank, studded with circular beds of roses, and sloping down to a range of highly-cultivated gardens, that swept round to and joined the old garden before the ancient ivied wing; a lawn; a short carriage-drive running through slopes covered with myrtle, sweetbriar, and other flowering and sweet-smelling shrubs—and the sparkling glass of hothouses and conservatories, gave a delicious aspect to the place, as it lay on the bosom of its own green hill, nestled by the woods.

Old Mrs. Dacres never fairly recovered the shock of her daughter's death, and she died some months after, having given her first kiss to her first grandchild—another bright and gentle Fanny.

And the two families, united as they were by all the ties that can make friendship perfect, lived in a state of happiness, which only the beauty of the mutual concord of love and esteem can ever give to social intercourse. One of the carriages of Larch-hall or of the parsonage was every day on the road to the other place; and the two young mothers seemed to have no new enjoyments which were not increased by communicating them to each other.

Glendale became famous as one of the most delightful places in the west of England to visit. The sweet repose of the parsonage, the magnificent beauty of Larch-hall, the elegant splendour of its hospitalities, and the lavish means of field sports, which its master had at his command, with the delightful society which the families afforded, and that of such visitors as were ever met there, made an invitation from Stuart or Eva (towards the end of the London season) to spend the first portion of

the autumn months in their happy valley, a thing perhaps more appreciated and sought after, from its difficulty to be procured.

This was the only break in the beloved seclusion of the Eden they had raised around them. And so they now live, with prospects serene and tranquil, minds at ease, and hearts filled with the noblest and most delightful affections of our kind.

Ginny Mostyn returned from what she coolly called her marriage trip; and having secured her fortune, the young couple took a pretty little cottage, with splendid stables, in the neighbourhood of Raby-hall. Lady Mostyn was for a long time too indignant at her daughter's marriage to see her; but Ginny, who, happy in the mutual passion of Percy and herself (an attachment which had existed for so many years), took her usual gallops, and even sometimes accompanied her husband when he followed the Mostyn hounds.

This completely secured the forgiveness of Sir Charles. A fearless, yet cool rider, her steady little hand, her graceful and secure seat, and the *nonchalance* with which she took the most formidable leaps, warmed the heart of the jolly baronet; and at the conclusion of her second day's appearance in the field, he slapped his buckskins with delight, and galloping up to his daughter's side, put his arm affectionately round her, and gave her a hearty kiss.

"Ginny, I forgive you everything," he exclaimed.

"You nearly pulled me off my mare," replied Ginny, settling herself in her saddle. And so the reconciliation took place.

Soon after this, Lady Mostyn gave in as far as to receive her daughter and her son-in-law; but to Mrs. Northcott (who by the by had had nothing to do with any part of the affair) she never could be reconciled.

An event, however, occurred some few



months after harmony had been restored between Ginevra and her parents, which completely changed the fortunes of Lieutenant Northcott, R.N., and his self-sufficient pretty wife.

One morning, as Sir Charles Mostyn had just stepped into the breakfast-room in his dressing gown and slippers, a servant entered to inform him that Sir Marmaduke Digby (who was on horseback at a door opening into a paved court at the rear of the mansion) requested Sir Charles to come down and look at the horse, and give his opinion of it, as it was a new purchase.

Poor Sir Charles would have left many things, that he preferred to breakfast, to look at a horse; so going down the back stairs, he was seen with his hands in the pockets of his dressing gown, examining the animal, and conning over its points, without taking the least notice of the baronet on its back.

Sir Marmaduke pressed his inquiries, and the other, telling his neighbour to dismount, sprang at once into the saddle dressed as he was.

He made the horse rattle gallantly across the court-yard, and getting on the park drives, caused the warming brute to show its paces to the admiration of Sir Marmaduke; but on returning at the back door of the mansion, Sir Charles, in dismounting dropped his left slipper; the foot ran through the stirrup, just as he was throwing himself off the horse. He fell heavily on his back, his foot still fixed in the stirrup, but as he retained the bridle in his hand, he made an effort to recover himself.

This, however, the alarmed animal would not allow. Kicking up its heels, and going desperately round, Sir Charles had just power to keep its head in a position so close to his own shoulder, that the furious kicks were bestowed upon the air; but the struggles of the animal became more distracted. Sir Marmaduke cried

out loudly for help, grooms and other servants appeared, and seized the horse just as Sir Charles Mostyn received a blow on the back of the head, which rendered him insensible.

He never spoke again, and died on the evening of that day.

But that was not all. Poor little Pauline, the invalid, of whom Lady Mostyn has occasionally spoken in the progress of the preceding scenes, had witnessed the whole frightful affair from the window of her room. It seems to have frozen her heart—she uttered no cry, and she shed no tear—but it killed her. And ere Sir Charles Mostyn had been three weeks laid among the bones of his fathers, the vault had to be opened again to receive the body of his younger daughter.

Raby-hall became the property of Ginny, now the only child, who, six months after her father's death, removed to the family mansion—Lady Mostyn having, some days before, returned to a tall gray, mossy-roofed house,

with peaked gables, small windows, and surrounded with trees and rooks, the dowagers' established residence on the family estate. Her ladyship always had a horror of this place, which she said was nothing better than living in a church-yard; but notwithstanding that, she refused to remain in Raby-hall with Ginny for its mistress, and left the mansion, as has been said, before her daughter was to arrive.

But the kindness of Ginevra, the birth of children, and the frank and generous character of the son-in-law, reconciled Lady Mostyn to her family again, although she still jealously maintained the dignity of fretful retirement in the dowager house—but to Mrs. Northcott she never could be reconciled. And as the latter lady, her acts, qualities, and opinions (from her connexion with the family) are necessarily brought under the notice of Lady Mostyn, they are an everlasting source of bitterness and railing to her ladyship, which forms the only excitement that she permits herself to enjoy.

Mrs. Aylmer, having no longer any reason to dislike the doctor's wife, receives her in good neighbourhood. The mistress of Elmcourt still sits in peevish state in the beautiful mansion, in which so many important parts of this narrative were played, with bright-green slopes, groups of noble elms, gardens, shrubberies, and all the outward elegance of life around her; but there are no merry noises within these walls, no sound of harp or piano greets the visitor at his entrance—though everything is highly kept; from the pruned lawn on which no one walks, and the faultless gardens whom no one comes to see, to the stately entrance-hall, with its lavish equipments, and the splendid chambers in which the lady sits—they have all equally the appearance of solitude.

The most frequent visitor at Elmcourt now is Mrs. William Weatherspoon, where she is always well received. Her own home has become more insupportable every year, and she spends most of her time with Mrs. Aylmer,

to whose amusement and pleasure she has completely devoted herself. The cause of her new domestic troubles was the circumstance of Mr. Weatherspoon having discovered, soon after Clara's departure, that his wife had concealed treasure, a private purse (as he believed) secretly kept back from her little fortune on their marriage. Mr. Weatherspoon could have forgiven anything but this.

In vain did his perplexed wife, who could not tell the truth of the matter, commence fabricating statements of so contradictory a kind that they only confirmed Mr. Weatherspoon in his opinion that his wife had a stock of concealed money; and the first step he took was instantly to stop her pocket allowance. This was a measure which created equal indignation on the other side; and the consequence was perpetual bickerings, in which, however, the old Scotchman, whose temper did not improve with increasing years, generally had the best of it. And poor Mrs. Weatherspoon,

from her inveterate love of finery, and the desperate state of her private funds, was content to receive Mrs. Aylmer's cast-off dresses, which, by the aid of an active needle and a natural ingenuity for such things, she managed to fit to her own more portly person. She also renewed her love of wandering, and frequently went down to Larch-Hall and Glendale, where, in the enjoyment of every comfort so dear to her increasing years, and of which she was so miserably stinted at home, she spent many happy weeks. The subject on which she had become most eloquent was her constant denunciation of the Scottish people; for her own husband being the only Scotchman whom she had ever known, she imagined that the whole nation resembled him. Not only did she enlarge on this matter to her host and hostess, but also to the servants and the children; yet, in spite of all troubles, Mrs. Weatherspoon had an inexhaustible fund of animal spirits, on which nothing seemed to be

able to make an impression; and on returning from these visits she had always a budget of anecdotes and other reports concerning both the Westmoreland families, which, as she told them with high glee, never failed to be at Elmcourt interesting to her patroness.

But Mrs. Aylmer had a permanent inmate and companion in Miss Stanley. That lady having got somewhat tired of her original profession, owing to an increasing love of gossip, and appreciation of the comforts of life, gladly acceded to Mrs. Aylmer's request that she would reside at Elmcourt in the capacity above-mentioned. Her attachment to the other members of the family was another reason why she was so well pleased with a comfortable but secluded residence in Derbyshire. She is now *au courant* with the minutest circumstances connected with the families—corresponds with Eva and Fanny—has become very fond of making bargains, criticising sermons, and attending scientific lectures, whenever she has an opportunity.



She has also grown rather stout, wears false hair, and drinks bottled porter at luncheon. Yet Miss Stanley is still very good and kind, and has established a little Sabbath school in Elmhurst, of which she takes all the trouble. She is looking forward with much pleasure to the time when she may instruct Eva's children, to whom she is already devoted.

There is another visiter, so frequently at Elm-court, that he may be almost called an inmate. This is Sir Marmaduke Digby. He remained after his wife's elopement, and made himself very useful at that trying time—in arranging Isabel's funeral, and managing the house, during the prostration of grief in which the rest of the family lay. Sir Marmaduke bore his own share in the calamity very well indeed ; until, on consulting his attorney, he found out that he could not touch a shilling of his wife's thirty thousand pounds ; and it was of no use prosecuting Sir Felix Vane for money, as, in the language of the profession, he was a man

of straw - but if he wished to do it for the purpose of obtaining a divorce, the expenses of the action, with those of getting the bill through parliament, would amount, one way or other, to a sum considerably beyond a thousand pounds. Sir Marmaduke buttoned up his trousers pocket at this intimation, and told the attorney he would think of it.

Disappointed and enraged at the loss of so much, the baronet for some time gave way to the profoundest grief. He still, however, spent most of his time at Elmcourt, and having dismissed from his own house such servants as were not positively required to take care of the place, he put the others on board wages, while he himself dined nearly every day with Mrs. Aylmer. This arrangement was gratifying to that lady for several reasons; the chief of which were, that she considered Sir Marmaduke as a sort of son and protector, and that his continuing to regard himself one of the family, after the distressing event which had

occurred, was paying herself and her own personal character, and also her domestic circle, a compliment which, from a person in the baronet's unfortunate situation, could not fail to tell well in protecting the mother's position in society from being much affected by the follies of her girls.

And yet Mrs. Aylmer had long nights and days of bitterness of heart. She could not avoid accusing herself of having educated her daughters, more for the paths of vanity, than for those of virtue ; and she now says rather less than she had been in the habit of doing, of the advantages of a French education.

Of Lady Julia Maddy, as the reader knows so little, very little shall be said. Her ladyship has got very thin, yet preserves a portion of her beauty, and all her elegant style. She continues to caress and feed her bullfinches and canaries ; to occupy herself in the active duties of various religious societies, of which she is a member ; and to dress with more and more

careful taste every year. She still goes a little into society, but whether there or in retirement, a strange whisper, to which no one seems able to give an explicit interpretation, follows Lady Julia Maddy. *Good-natured* people say it will cease when she marries.

And now to look after our friends abroad. Sir Felix Vaine, after all his confident expectations, failed (as has been seen) in obtaining a wife of his own with two hundred thousand pounds, but he managed to procure the wife of another man with thirty. With this latter acquisition, much as Sir Felix liked to deal in such matters, he would never have suffered himself to be blessed, at least before the eyes of a discerning public, if it had not been that some of his creditors, not being able to understand the reason of the delay in his announced marriage with the heiress, and irritated by their recollection of the fresh advances with which, on the faith of this event, they had furnished him in London, made a dead-set at the

baronet, and Sir Felix became conscious that he stood in jeopardy every hour. So indifferent generally was he to anything except his vanity and personal gratification, that this disagreeable position affected his peace of mind less than it would have done most other persons; but for all that, it formed a powerful reason to induce him the more readily to abandon his hopes in Eva, for the charms of Lady Digby, the enjoyment of her society in a foreign country, and the pleasure of managing her thirty thousand pounds. "This sort of thing will do very well, in the meantime (thought he, as he handed the beautiful Clara into the Dover steam-packet) for a man who is stumped."

But Sir Felix soon found he had been stumped in another way. Strange as it may appear, this thoughtless woman had been influenced just as much by aversion and contempt for her husband, as Sir Felix had been from fear and dread of his creditors, in making up her

mind to the elopement. The weight of affection between them was pretty well balanced. They were certainly for some time excessively fond of each other, but it was not that fondness which could give Sir Felix the slightest influence over a woman of Clara's character.

Lady Digby was a person who never blushed nor wept, nor exhibited any feminine weakness of a nature to put arms in the hands of a lover; she quietly settled down in Paris, at the head of a very pretty little *ménage*, and was as free from any control of Sir Felix Vaine, as she had been from that of Sir Marmaduke Digby. Finding that her lover was in needy circumstances, and having an idea that he had a disposition to gambling, she never allowed him to draw upon her fortune, beyond an occasional hundred pounds or so, for his immediate necessities. This was all very annoying to Sir Felix Vaine, but he had his own consola-

tions too, for his fine person and his splendid English riding horses had already excited the warmest admiration of the Parisian dames. Neither was Clara without admirers as speedily, and as she drove her pair of beautiful white ponies in the Bois-de-Boulogne, her carriage was always being passed and re-passed by the fashionable loungers of that most fashionable rendezvous.

They also were warmly received in very pleasant society, and all was *couleur de rose* for the first few months, for Sir Felix, who had the faculty of getting into debt wherever he went, and being the nominal master of what was considered in Paris a splendid establishment, had no difficulty in supplying himself with nearly all the luxuries of life; and Clara—although she paid for hers—did the same.

But of course this state of things could not last. Clara grew peevish, and Sir Felix grew morose; and so perfectly did their manners to

each other resemble those which follow a *marriage de convenance*, that it gave a sort of respectability to their position from the absence of anything clandestine in the appearance of their connexion.

The first thing which disgusted Clara with Sir Felix, was his eternal boastings of his conquests; and the first thing that disgusted Sir Felix with Clara, was her saying, when she wished to take a nap in her *fauteuil* after dinner—"Felix, tell me all those things you used to invent about your conquests again, for I want to be put to sleep."

In point of fact, they were both too well matched, for the one ever to gain much advantage over the other; and although gay, happiness, even of the most transient kind, was rapidly departing from them.

The first great blow which Clara felt, was on being one day informed by a chattering lady from Derbyshire of her own elopement, and



the death of Isabel on the same night. Clara had never corresponded with her family since she ran away; and although she had seen in one or two newspapers, a small paragraph announcing this event, there was no mention in these journals of Isabel. The blow sobered her. She had been fretful and unhappy before, but now she was miserable.

Desolate is the path of the wanton when the short period of her blinding madness has passed away; and Clara now saw that path before her, and shuddered. For in the solemn language of the Psalmist, "Her sin had found her out;" and though her heart was changed, it was only changed to gloom and despair. For *she had now no future.*

She had squandered her inheritance of youth, beauty, and that nameless homage paid to purity, which is so delightful to woman's heart to receive. She had burned out the sweetest feelings of her nature by a crime, for which,

in this world at least, there is no forgiveness. She could not find a hope in all her thoughts to cheer her in the wilderness of her prospects, and she was most discontented with her present lot.

To her horror she began to see that her beauty was rapidly fading. This had always been the dearest possession of her life; she reckoned it above all other qualities, even virtue itself; it was the consolation, the happiness, the triumph of her heart—and now it was passing away.

Lady Digby soon sank into that wretched state of seeming apathy, which is but one of the cloaks of despair—that chronic suffering of the mind, which lasts so long, and works so slowly on the frame. She still went into society, and the change in her manner there, was not much detected; for Clara in her youngest days always played the queen; but the dry brightness of her once soft eyes, the peevish expression of the once handsome mouth, and the angular points of her relaxed countenance, betrayed to those

who understood these signs, that peace had forsaken that fading bosom.

Several years were passed by Clara in this state, without any change in the character of her mind or person, except that the latter was fast losing every trace of bloom and beauty. It is a dull distemper, this hopeless weariness of the heart, and can last a lifetime ; and Clara loathed her life, though she feared to die. With the natural sauciness of her nature, which no suffering could entirely destroy, she has made no effort to break off her connexion with Sir Felix Vaine ; and he on his part is in circumstances which makes it impossible for him to do so.

Seven years have taken Sir Felix's youth quite away. It had been pretty well squandered ere he joined himself to Lady Digby ; and the once handsome baronet is showing some slight indications of the "smack of time." The gray is mingling thickly with his once

dark hair ; he is becoming a *soupeçon* too round in the waist, and the crows have dug their feet very cruelly into his countenance. Could there be a greater punishment for Sir Felix Vaine than this ?

Yet still his greatest pleasure remains the same, that of ogling, flirting, and making conquests. Although he cannot return to England, and is overwhelmed with debts in France; although now, in middle age, he has no distinct prospect of becoming respectably settled in any, except the steadfast hope, that has never left him, of ultimately marrying a young and beautiful heiress—he manages to keep himself tolerably free of spleen in society ; but it is easy to see that Sir Felix Vaine is so often harassed by sad thoughts at the worthless issue to which he has brought the unusual advantages of his youth.

The world has forgotten them both. Even in Paris, where they have remained the whole seven years, they have ceased to be a novelty

in any way, and therefore have passed into indifference. The once *bel Anglais* and his beautiful *milady* have degenerated into the tall gentleman who is continually to be seen in the Tuilleries gardens, and the pale lady who drives the pair of white horses in the Bois-de-Boulogne; and they are regarded no more than the thousand others who are regularly found in those places.

And the last actor in the scenes which have been exhibited in the previous chapters, sleeps by her mother's side in the English burying-ground of Naples. A simple tablet of white marble erected by Alice to the memory of her parent, is there, but neither her own name nor the record of her death is on the stone. The raised sod, covered with long waving grass, is the only monument to her memory.

And the beautiful villa of Solari is now among the deserted halls of Italy. Alice left no will, and relations, of whom she had never

in her own life heard, rose up in considerable numbers, claiming to be her heirs. Lawsuits multiplied, which still are pending, and the property in question is getting, year after year, in a more neglected state.

The old porter, Margaret, and one other aged servant, of all those who had once been employed in this magnificent retreat, alone remain. The porter sleeps at his post all day long as usual, without a thought or care regarding the desolation around him; and Margaret, who never recovered the dejection of heart which followed the death of her young mistress, sits with a mournful and almost vacant eye, knitting in the room where Alice died, during the long hours of every day; nobody but herself in all the silent chambers and galleries around her. And the other servant is a tall, grave woman, of a severe melancholic temperament, devoted to the mortifications of her religion.

The place is like a vast tomb ; weeds grow amid the the pavings of the splendid quadrangle, and grass peeps, here and there, from the chiselled marble walls. Birds build their nests without fear in the window corners, and their twitterings and carollings are the only sounds that break upon the stillness.

Around the house, it is the same. The gardens have run wild ; the grotto, that had been such a favourite with both its owners, has partly fallen down, and the beautiful shells are mingled with creeping plants and tangled roses. There is still a sweet perfume of the jessamine Alice planted, but its tiny flowers can scarcely be seen through the weeds. The fountain is dried up, except a small stream that makes the grass-plat sodden ; and all traces of cultivation are quickly passing from the scene.

And the seasons come and go, and the old porter continues to dose, unconscious that his hair grows whiter ; and poor Margaret still

knits in the silent rooms, heedless of everything around her; while the devotée below, spends much of her time in the little chapel, offering up daily prayers for soul of her departed mistress.

THE END.

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